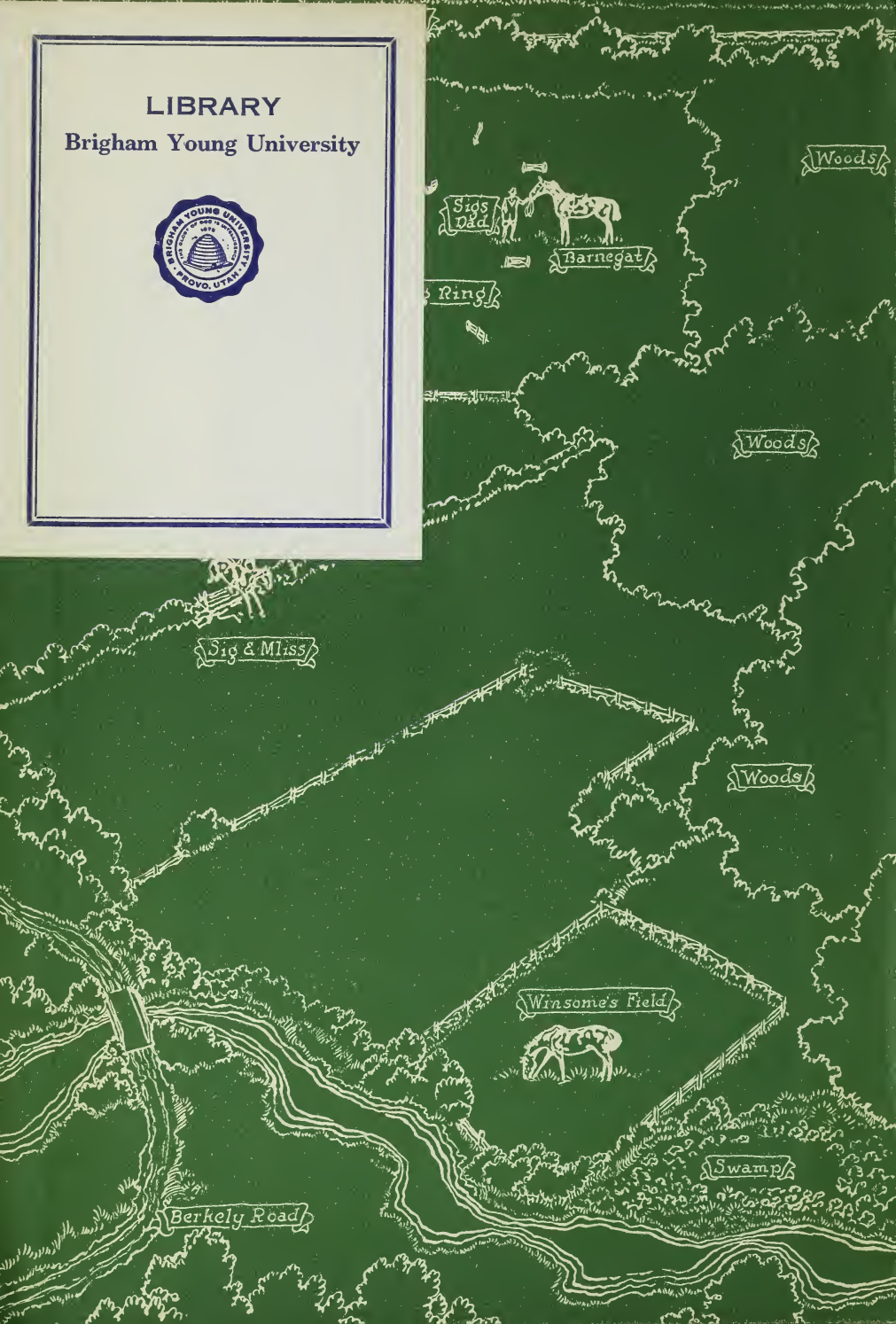
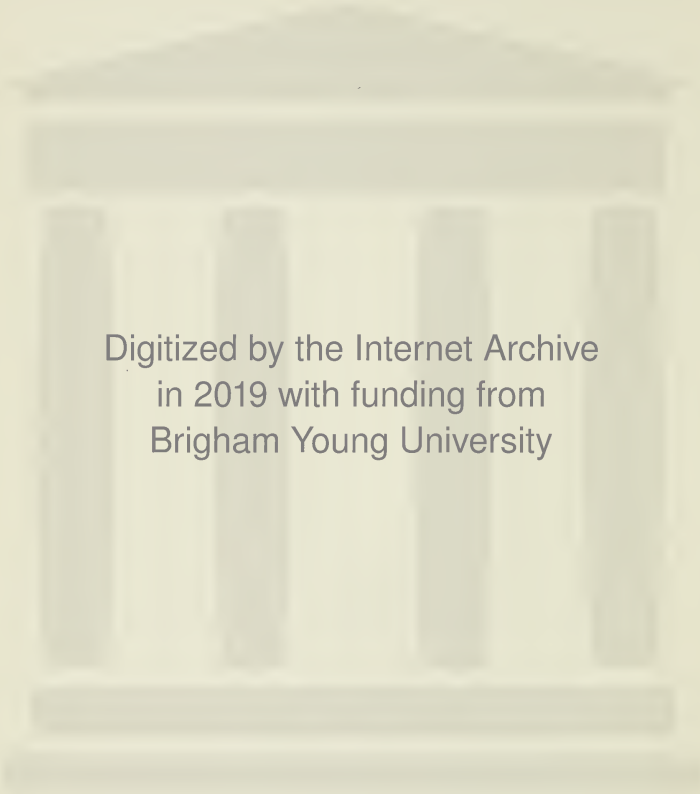




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Buttonwood Island

BOOKS BY
LAVINIA R. DAVIS

HOBBY HORSE HILL
BUTTONWOOD ISLAND



*Sig slid all the way
down the bank on Mliss's back!*

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Buttonwood Island

By LAVINIA R. DAVIS

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BROWN

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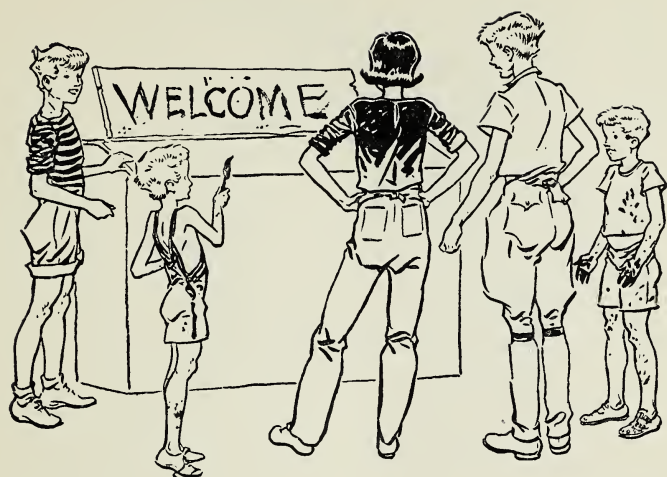
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In grateful memory of
A. R. W.
who would have recognized
much of this book

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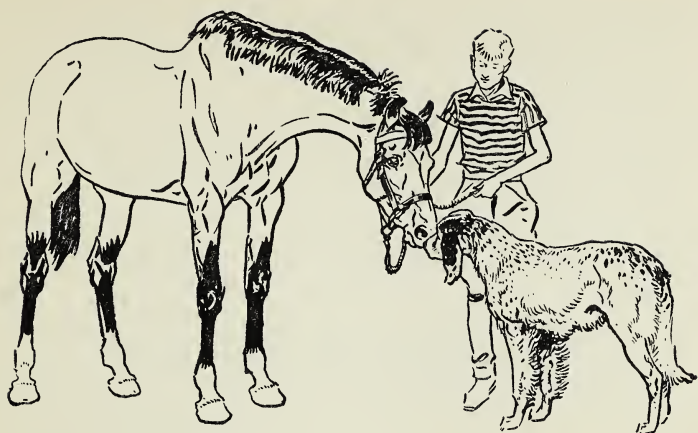


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Buttonwood Island

CHAPTER I: PIG AT A PARTY



THE WINDING DRIVEWAY that led from the Hardwicks' house to the country road was cool and shady. As the station wagon moved away from the front porch Lyb and Sandy disappeared in the jungle of overgrown shrubs. The car went around the first bend, and suddenly, like Indians rising from ambush, they rushed out from behind a copper beech and a big syringa.

"Good-by! Good-by! GOOD-BY!" they shouted.

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The car passed, and they hurried after it into the middle of the driveway. The car turned onto the road. There was a glisten of paint, a final toot of the horn, and it was gone.

“Well, that’s over!” Lyb said. “The last of the governesses.”

Sandy traced a little design in the sand with one foot and said nothing. Lyb led the way to a sheltered spot under the tentlike branches of a big hemlock and they threw themselves on the ground. From where they lay they could see the big square-cut Victorian house and the cluster of yellow barns that spread out on the hill behind it. The vines and shrubs directly around the house had just been trimmed, and it had a bare, surprised look like a boy with a summer haircut. “Well, Mademoiselle’s gone!” Lyb said, turning away from the house. “And Mother’s home for good and we’ll never have another governess. No more summer work!”

Sandy rocked back and forth on his haunches and smiled to himself. “No more tidying,” he said thankfully. “No more snooping to find out what you can throw away.”

Lyb nodded sympathetically. Mademoiselle was the worst of all the governesses they had had at Elm

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Top in the two years that Mother had been sick. It wasn't just her summer lessons, though they were bad enough. It was, as Sandy said, the snooping. The climax came when she poked into Sandy's room and threw away two perfectly good arrowheads because she thought they were just sharp stones. They had looked everywhere, even in the big dump hole where the Hardwicke garbage rotted away, but the arrowheads were never found.

Lyb plucked a leaf of dandelion and began to chew it. It was rather bitter, but she sucked it conscientiously. Drink the bitterness to the lees, she thought, and wondered why she hadn't made up a really good poem about Sandy's loss. It hadn't occurred to her, though goodness knows Sandy had felt badly enough. Somehow it was difficult to make up poems about someone you knew as well as your own younger brother. Joan of Arc was easy, or the Cid even, but not Sandy.

She looked at him now, and her straight nose wrinkled slightly with disgust. Sandy was almost asleep. He lay curled up in the June sun just beyond the hemlock tent, looking more like the dormouse than ever.

Lyb leaned over and pinched him hard. "Sandy,

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wake up," she said. "This isn't any time to go to sleep."

"Why not?" Sandy mumbled, and tried to roll out of reach.

"Because—because. Well, because Mademoiselle's just gone and Mother's home for good and we ought to celebrate." As Lyb finally thought of a reason her words came out in a rush.

Sandy grunted and rolled up in a tighter ball than ever. Lyb stood up, and her dark face was determined. If anything at all was going to happen that afternoon it would have to start happening right away. Once Sandy really settled down for a sleep he was lost. It was the same way when he settled into reading, or hunting for arrowheads, or anything that interested him. Once he got really started you couldn't pry him away.

Lyb leaned over Sandy's khaki shorts and pinched again. Somehow the pinch gave her an inspiration. "Sandy," she said, "I've got a real idea. We're captive slaves newly released from prison. Our cruel tyrant has just been banished. We celebrate. We light the festal fires."

Sandy tried to brush Lyb away as though she were a mosquito, but his brown eyes were open, and Lyb

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knew he was listening. She hurried on, her voice changing and quivering to hold her audience. "Our cruel tyrant can no longer harm us. We make libations to the gods. Burnt sacrifices. Everything."

Suddenly Sandy sat up. History had worked as Lyb knew it would. "Greeks would be punk," he said. "We neither of us know enough. But Indians——" His round brown eyes darkened under their light lashes. "Indians would be swell," he said, and jumped up beside Lyb. "I know enough for both of us, and we could make it perfectly authentic. Real, you know. It's the kind of thing that happened right here on this place. Come on up to the house while I think about it."

He started toward the house, walking so fast that Lyb had to run. Sandy was eleven and looked only nine, but sometimes when he got really interested in something Lyb, who was thirteen, had trouble keeping up with him. Sandy either was asleep and quite out of the picture or he was so absorbed that it was almost frightening. "Greeks might be more fun," Lyb suggested. "The costumes would be easier. And I could make an oration." Already the words began to hum through her mind. "For all the gods of Hellas who look down . . ."

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"We're going to be Indians," Sandy said, and it was settled. "It's a real idea. We can have the kind of fire they built and have it right down by the Black River where they built them."

Lyb nodded and gave in. Sometimes she wished that Mother's brother, Uncle Rob Saunders, who lived up at Old Lyme and was quite an amateur archæologist, had never gotten Sandy interested in his own favorite hobby. Certainly since Sandy had learned that the Black River which ran past the foot of Elm Top was old Indian country it had been next to impossible to get him started in anything else. Lyb → sighed and walked faster. She would give in on its being an Indian festival, and then Sandy would have to give her the best part. Lyb wished it were something smarter, more poetic than Indians, but still you might be able to make something out of a captured chieftain or an Indian princess.

"Are you going to ask the twins?" she said.

Sandy shook his head. "Spuggy's too little," he said. "He wouldn't get the point. He'd just want to wear his Indian suit and make a lot of noise. And we can't have Spinney without him."

Lyb agreed thoroughly, but usually she was the one that had to stop the twins from butting in. It

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was funny when you came to think of it. Sandy would be completely lost in his old Indians or something and then all of a sudden he'd come to to suggest that they take Spuggy riding or that Spinney be allowed to come on the picnic. Lyb sighed. As far as she was concerned the five-year-old twins were just one more trial in a trying world.

By the time they reached the house Sandy had everything planned. "You get some matches," he said. "We ought to make a fire the Indian way, but it takes too long. Get some raw meat too, if Maggie'll give it to you, and some dry beans. We can get corn up at the barn."

Lyb first made sure the twins were nowhere around the big high-ceilinged house. They weren't in the stiff Victorian drawing room that had somehow become more livable since Mother came home from the hospital, nor in the dining room, nor the big open hall. Lyb looked upstairs in Spuggy's room. It was a comfortable jumble of toy carts, Teddy bears, sailboats, an erector set, and part of an Indian suit, but Spuggy was not there. She looked next door. Spinney's room was as cool and collected as the little girl herself but it was quite empty.

Lyb hurried down the dark back stairs to the

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kitchen. "Where's Spuggy?" she asked, but old Maggie O'Rourke shook her head.

"Lord love you, child, I wouldn't have a notion. Rambling wild, I guess, the way his dada did in the old days. Sure, he's the only one takes after his dad or the missis either."

Lyb helped herself to beans without saying anything. It made her furious the way Maggie always acted as though Spuggy were the only child in the family who wasn't a freak, but there wasn't anything she could do. Maggie had taken care of Dad when he was a little boy and she had to be humored. It's ill-bred to argue with servants, Lyb thought with comforting superiority, but Maggie brought her crashing back to earth.

"Don't you lead Sandy or the twins into mischief now, Lyb Hardwicke," Maggie said. "I'm always worryin' when I see that wise-cat look you're after getting."

Lyb was so angry she wanted to shake Maggie, but instead she marched from the room with her head in the air. She was through the door when she suddenly remembered the meat. For a moment she hesitated and then she stalked back after it. She took it and walked out again without looking around.

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She shut the door quickly, but despite its noise she could hear the insulting cackle of Maggie O'Rourke's loud laugh.

When she met Sandy his pants' pockets bulged with stones, his shoelaces were undone, and his hair, where he had rubbed his fingers through it, stood up perfectly straight on end. "I just looked it up," he said, "and it's all O.K. The Indians on both sides of the Housatonic used to celebrate getting rid of Hobemeka, the evil spirit, and getting back the good one."

They started out from the house toward the old-fashioned cupolaed barn. Sandy still sputtered with excitement, but Lyb was no longer thrilled. She was too mad at Maggie to think about anything else. It was all because Mother had been sick for two years and Maggie was used to going over the head of the governesses. Now that Mother was back and they were all really living together again at Elm Top things would soon straighten out. Mother had been home only a month, and already things had improved. The living room had fresh gay curtains and a whole shelf load of new books. There were always flowers in the house now, and there was a new saddle horse in the barn.

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"I'm going to get Tip," Sandy said. "The Indians were great on having dogs in their villages."

Lyb nodded and waited beside the big barn. On one side she could look at the big mansard-roofed house that was unlike any other in the Millerton valley. On the other side of the barn was the valley itself, green and lovely, stretching on and on until it reached all the way to where the foothills of the Berkshires looked purply blue in the distance.

Sandy came out with the old black cocker trotting gravely along beside him. "We might ride down to the river," he said, "but I'm not sure the Indians around here used horses."

→ Lyb started to walk, glad that he had decided against riding. She remembered guiltily that she hadn't had Sunny Jim out for three days. Sunny would have his ears back then, and Lyb didn't like him with his ears back. Last summer and the summers before Lyb had ridden on Potato Pete, the farm horse, and a few times over at the riding academy in Millerton. When Mother had first told them that they were getting a saddle horse she had been thrilled, but the thrill had cooled off with Sunny's first buck. "I rode Pete this afternoon," Sandy said complacently, but Lyb didn't answer.

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It was very different riding a frisky horse by yourself from riding at an academy, where there were plenty of people to watch you get on and a grown man to go along on the ride. It wasn't just the feeling that the man could help you, but somehow it was always so much easier to be brave in front of a crowd than to be brave alone.

They crossed the uneven fields toward the narrow fringe of woods that guarded the Black River. Lyb hurried along and put the unpleasant truth in the back of her mind. It wasn't just that she was afraid of Sunny, she tried to convince herself. It was just that she didn't want to ride right now because she was busy amusing Sandy.

They reached the edge of the river and stopped to look down at their own reflections in the still water that moved smoothly over the dark bottom of leaf mold and black clay. They moved on again and passed the pool by the willow trees where, in the spring and fall when the river was high, they sometimes waded through the mud to swim. Finally they came out on the open river bank beyond the woods.

They climbed over a stone wall into a rocky field, and Sandy found two big gray boulders that made

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a perfect natural fireplace. "This is just right," he said, and placed his two Indian ax heads on either side of one of the boulders. "I'll start the fire, and then you be the first Indian that prances around asking Kotantowit, the good spirit, to take the place of Hobemeka. You get into the middle of the dance, and then I come and sacrifice the beans and corn and the deer flesh."

Sandy collected a few handfuls of dry leaves, and in a moment the fire curled around the edges of the rock. The smoke spiraled upward in a thin gray question mark. It was a perfect Indian fire, and for the first time Lyb began to feel her part. She picked up the ax heads and began to prance around the fire, her feet pointing, her head low. "Hobemeka, Hobemeka, get thee hence!" she muttered. "Kotantowit, Kotantowit, come from whence!"

Lyb felt pleased at getting a rhyme almost without trying. Her Indian dance grew freer, wilder. Her arms, weighted by the ax heads, swung high. Her straight dark hair blew in the wind. Her chin lifted and her heart pounded faster. "Hobemeka! Hobemeka!" Lyb was an Indian. A Podunk chieftain inciting the good spirit.

Suddenly there was a loud crash in the woods be-

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hind them! Lyb stopped dead in her tracks. The underbrush crackled. Lyb's heart beat faster than ever. There couldn't be Indians. It was just because she and Sandy were acting. The next instant Sandy gave a yell. Tip began to bark, and then Lyb saw the pig!

It was a real pig. Very young, very pink, with a dog collar around its neck!

"It's a pig," Sandy said stupidly. "A pig!"

The next moment Spuggy crashed through the woods after the pig. His blue denims were torn, his freckled face was scratched, his red hair was dark with sweat. "Help," he shouted when he saw the others. "Help me get my pig!"

In an instant Lyb had dropped the ax heads and was in full pursuit. Sandy picked up the ax heads, put them down on the rock, and ran after her. They chased the pig down the side of the river and past the marsh. He circled back through the woods, and they came out again on the field. The pig headed blindly for one of the big boulders, saw it, turned, and doubled right into Spuggy's arms.

Spuggy held on with all his might. "I've got it," he gasped, and the next minute Lyb and Sandy were beside him.

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"Wh-wh-where," began Sandy. "Where in the name of Pete——"

"Did you get that pig?" Lyb finished for him. "And where's Sybella?"

Poor Spuggy was so breathless he could hardly speak, and when he did speak he answered both the questions at once. "Spinney's gathering acorns and Joe gave me the pig."

"Spencer Hardwicke, how dare you come down here and scare us to death?"

Spuggy's big blue eyes looked surprised. "I didn't mean to scare you. I—I just wanted to catch Pooker!"

"Where did Pooker come from?"

"Joe gave him to me, and the collar too, because Spinney's got a cat. He said he'd follow me just like a dog. He did follow for a little while, but then when I tried to help Spinney he ran away and I had to go after him."

Lyb looked at the pig and then at Spuggy. He was small, dirty, and very tired. For a moment she was almost sorry for him. Then her mouth set steely hard as she remembered how she had been an Indian brave until Spuggy had shattered the illusion. "Spencer Hardwicke," she began again, but Sandy was already working for peace.

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"You take Pooker home on a leash," he told Spuggy. "My belt'll do." He took it off and wove it carefully through the pig's collar. Spuggy tried leading, but the pig had other plans. His fat head was down. His nose was flat, his small eyes were lost in fat. He squatted and would not be moved. "He wants to be carried," Sandy said. "Come on, Spugs, and I'll help you."

They started up over the rough field. For a few feet Spuggy struggled with the pig, but it was too much for him and Sandy took him over. They were halfway home when suddenly Sandy stopped short. "Lyb!" he said. "We forgot the ax heads and the fire! We've got to put it out."

Lyb said nothing but looked at the squirming pig. She could tell even before she lifted it that it would be hard and bristly. Still, it was better to take it than to walk all the way back to the river to put out the fire. She made a face and took the pig unwillingly in her arms. "I won't be gone a minute," Sandy said. "Wait for me at the barn."

When they came to the top of the hill they could see Spinney waiting for them on the little slope by the barn door. The minute she saw them she dropped the tortoise-shell cat that had been in her lap and

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ran up to them. "Spuggy," she said, "why did you go without me?"

Spuggy wiped his hot face on his arm and looked at his twin. "Pooker went without *me*," he said. "So I had to go catch him."

"You were thilly," Spinney said with just a trace of a lisp. "Joe came along and he's made a beautiful Pooker-run out of the old chicken house."

Lyb watched the twins go off to the chicken house holding the pig between them. She stretched out in the long grass to wait for Sandy. He said he'd be quick, but he'd probably be gone for hours. He always was when he was anywhere near the river where there was a chance of finding arrowheads. Lyb had just picked out a particularly fresh leaf of dandelion when she heard the sound of running.

The next instant Sandy dashed around the corner of the barn with Tip at his heels. His usually pale face was red, and he panted so he could hardly speak. "Gone!" he said. "Both of them! And the fire."

"Sandy, what are you talking about?"

"I tell you the fire's out," Sandy said. "I went straight back and it was all black and wet. And my ax heads were gone!"

CHAPTER II: AN ISLAND AND A STRANGER



THEY WENT BACK after supper to look for the ax heads, but it was no use. It seemed to Sandy that the whole chorus of insects by the marshes mocked at them, and even the thrumb-the-thrumb of the bullfrogs was hostile. The June evening was long, but there was a storm coming and there was very little light. It was dark and damp, and the rank gray mist from the still river was hard to breathe.

They waded on through the thick grass by the river bank, but neither of them had much hope.

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"This is dumb!" Lyb said when she had stumbled over a hidden root. "It's much too dark to see anything. We'd better come in the morning."

Sandy tried to get as far as the place where they had built the fire, but inside the wood lot it was really dark, and he had to give in and follow Lyb home.

The next morning the twins were up early, as usual. For once as Sandy heard their sandals clattering down the hall he did not burrow further under the bedclothes. Instead he sat up and rubbed his eyes and tried to remember what had happened yesterday. He looked toward the bookshelf that he used as a museum and then suddenly he remembered. His ax heads, his two best finds, were lost.

He got up feeling that the day had started badly and dressed for breakfast. By the time he got downstairs the twins had already finished and gone off to the sand box. Father looked bigger and more businesslike than ever in his neat gray suit. His big old-fashioned watch lay out on the table in front of him, and as usual he was in a hurry. Lyb hovered over the side table trying to decide what she wanted to eat.

"Hi, Big Chief Find 'Em Quick," Mr. Hardwicke

AN ISLAND AND A STRANGER

said. "How's the collector?" Sandy grinned and said nothing. Usually Sandy could manage to laugh at Father's jokes, but they always made Lyb furious.

Right now Sandy moved over beside her to the side table where Maggie left things on hot plates while she took up Mother's tray. Bacon and broiled ham on one dish and oatmeal in another. Sandy helped himself to some crumbling yellow corn bread and two crisp pieces of ham. He sat down and began to eat, but he hardly tasted the food. Those ax heads were Podunk heads, at least he was pretty sure of it. He'd been waiting for months to go over to the Peabody Museum in New Haven to find out. For a moment, as Sandy looked at his father's pleasant sunburned face, he thought of asking him if he had any idea of where the heads could be found, but then suddenly he decided against it. He couldn't bear to laugh about those ax heads no matter how Father twisted it into a joke.

In a few more minutes Mr. Hardwicke was through his breakfast. He snapped his watch back into his pocket and then patted Lyb on the shoulder. "Don't make up any epic poems while you're riding Sunny," he said. "He might buck you off."

Lyb's mouth looked lemony but she didn't say

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anything, and Mr. Hardwicke went upstairs to say good-by to his wife.

By the time he came downstairs again Lyb and Sandy stood on the front porch to see him off. He picked up his brief case from the old chest in the hall and with a neat slanting motion slung it into the old Ford.

"Good shot!" Sandy said, and wondered how it would feel to have everything, even tossing a brief case into an open car, turn out the way you had planned it.

Mr. Hardwicke kissed Lyb, waved to Sandy, and began to start the Ford. He was just moving away when he leaned out and called back to Lyb, "Be careful with Sunny, now. Remember he's not Pegasus."

In another moment the little Ford was out of sight down the long drive. "Sometimes Father's too funny," Lyb said, but Sandy's mind was already back on his ax heads.

"Listen, Lyb," he said. "You said last night you'd help me look for those heads."

Lyb yawned. "It's awfully early," she said, but Sandy was already down the broad veranda stairs.

"Come on," he said. "You promised."

AN ISLAND AND A STRANGER

They went down over the long hill to the lowland fields. The day was cool and fresh after a night's rain. It was quite clear, and the shagbark hickory in the middle of the big field made a solitary patch of dark green in a sea of light, swaying timothy. At the end of the big field was the first wood lot that led to the patchwork of fields and swamps that made up the river lands.

They went through the first wood lot, and as usual Sandy's eyes were on the ground looking for arrowheads. There was always the chance of a find, but way up here it wasn't likely. According to everything he'd read, the Indians going from the Housatonic over to the open meadows where they planted their beans and corn took the straight path along the
→ Black River.

They came out of the woods and crossed the first small, stony pasture. The Hardwicke cows were let out here, and the grass and weeds, except for an occasional giant mullein or the stalks of last year's ironweeds, were cropped short. They climbed over a stone wall, and in a few minutes they were through the small lot of second-growth woods and out in the pasture where they had built their fire.

When they reached the two boulders they had

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used as a fireplace Sandy looked around carefully, but Lyb was impatient. "You've looked there twice already, Sandy," she said. "You must have put the heads in your pocket when you were chasing the pig, and they probably dropped out in the woods."

Sandy put his hands guiltily into his pockets. It was just possible, that was the worst part. It was so easy to forget where you'd put things when your mind was on something else. He looked at the charred wood at the foot of the rocks and felt more sure of himself. "What about the fire?" he said. "I tell you when I got back here the wood was all wet and steamy. Somebody put water on it and took the ax heads."

Lyb shrugged her shoulders, and it was plain that she didn't believe him. "Come on and look," she said. "We might find them in the south woods."

They went through the south woods that lay beyond the rocky field. The woods were near the end of their property, and even Sandy had seldom explored them. They followed the cow trails way beyond where they had chased the pig, and in a little while they came back out on the river again. They looked across the dark still water and saw that the opposite bank was part of a little island.

AN ISLAND AND A STRANGER

It was a gem of an island, set off by the river like the emerald in an old ring. It was a little higher than the mainlands, and the grass on it was unusually lush and green. At one end of the island was a giant buttonwood tree, and in its shadow was a little weather-beaten barn.

"Why—why—look!" said Lyb. "Has this always been here?"

Sandy shook his head. "River must have cut through by that swamp on the far side. Probably last fall, when they had the flood."

"It's just perfect," Lyb said. "A tree and wild flowers and some sort of house."

"It probably used to be the real river bank," Sandy said. "De Forest's *History* says that the Black River used to cover all of the swamp land through here."

Lyb wasn't interested in De Forest. Her mind was only on the island and how to reach it without getting wet. She hurried along the bank like a retriever on the trail of a rabbit.

"We weren't here yesterday," Sandy protested. "I couldn't have dropped my ax heads here, because we didn't come here." He might as well have protested to the moon. Lyb had found a big

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fallen tree that lay almost directly across the river.

“Sandy!” she shouted. “It’s a natural bridge!”

Sandy said nothing and watched Lyb run across. She held out her arms like a tightrope walker, and then when she was four feet from shore she jumped. “Come on,” she shouted. “I’m Balboa discovering the Pacific.”

Sandy looked back at the woods and thought of searching for his ax heads alone. He could do that any time, he decided. If he followed Lyb now she would help him on the way back, and Lyb had sharp eyes. Besides, the island which the new river bed had cut off from the mainland was irresistible. Sandy began to crawl laboriously over the fallen log.

Lyb never waited for anyone, and by the time Sandy had caught up with her he was breathless. “This place is wonderful!” she said. “It’s the best discovery we ever made.” She pointed to the old barn that was on the side of the swamp where the river had most recently washed through. “Do you suppose that’s where this used to connect with the mainland?”

Sandy studied the land carefully and pushed aside the grass with a long stick. He found two piles of stone near the marsh and a little way back two more

AN ISLAND AND A STRANGER

piles. "There used to be a bridge here," he said. "Maybe it went over the swamp to the good fields beyond."

Lyb ran to and fro like an excited spaniel. She picked a handful of golden alexanders and daisies, dropped them, and rushed off in a mad flurry of exploration. "Why didn't we ever come here before?" she called over her shoulder. "I guess because Mademoiselle was always keeping us busy near the house."

Sandy turned away from the stone foundations and looked up at the giant buttonwood that stood sentry at the further end of the island. That buttonwood was years and years older than the stone piles. It might have been there in the days when the Indians moved on silent, moccasined feet through these very valleys. Sandy moved nearer the tree, and suddenly the soft wind stirred through its leaves.

He looked carelessly at the huge tattered trunk and then looked more closely. "Sandy, come over here," Lyb called, but Sandy shook his head. There were marks on that tree trunk! Deeply cut marks that had been carved in years ago.

Sandy felt over the marks with his finger tips, and his heart beat faster. He had read somewhere,

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he couldn't remember where, that the Indians often marked trees that stood near the site of a duel. Sandy traced the cuts in the buttonwood again, and his excitement faded. The marks must have been made when the tree was already a giant. They had been cut some time ago but when the tree was nearly full grown, and it could not have been more than a sapling in Indian days.

Sandy felt thoroughly let down as he gave up the idea of Indian carvings. It was probably just the work of some farmer's boy who had lived near the place in his grandfather's time. Sandy moved away, but once more the leaves stirred in the tree and held him. The island was isolated and apart, and yet somehow it didn't seem lonely. Sandy leaned back against the great trunk. Once, hundreds of years ago, this tree had been on the direct path between the Housatonic and the meadow lands.

The direct path! Sandy's eyes snapped open and he saw Lyb disappear into the old shed, but he paid no attention to her. The direct path! If that was true the island would be a perfect place for arrow hunting!

Sandy began to walk slowly around the island. Once he heard a subdued croak as a bullfrog plopped

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into the water just ahead of him. Another time he nearly stepped on a painted turtle as it made its careful progress across the island. A crow cawed, and Sandy straightened up. He was too thrilled even to hunt for arrows. He saw a patch of bloodroot and leaned over to pick some. The white flower was gone, but the cutwork leaves were unmistakable. Sandy curled the leaf around his finger, remembering that the Indians had used the root for their red dye.

→ He walked on and found plenty of the wild black mustard that the Indians were supposed to have dried, and beyond that, clinging to the edge of the island, the rich green vine of the jewelweed which they valued as a medicine. He wondered what else the Indians could have used, and his eye fell on the green rushes that bristled at the edge of the swamp. Rushes for baskets and mats and, in the near-by woods, plenty of birch bark for huts and canoes.

A black snake slithered into the water just ahead of him, and Sandy jumped as though it had bitten him. He looked guiltily over his shoulder to see if Lyb had seen him, but she was looking at something else. A moment later he was back in his daydream of lean coppery figures crouching low over the water.

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The river wouldn't have been filthied then by a dozen distant factories, and the Indians could have drunk the water whenever they wanted.

Suddenly Lyb's sharp voice jerked him back into the present. "Sandy!" she said. "Who's that?"

Sandy looked where she pointed and could hardly believe his own eyes. It had seemed as though they were miles and centuries from any living human being. Yet here was a boy of about their own age coming across the fallen tree. He didn't pirouette across as Lyb had, nor crawl ignominiously like Sandy. Instead he walked as steadily and naturally as though he'd been walking across fallen logs all his life.

The boy was quite near them now, and Sandy could see that his light skin was almost solidly covered with freckles. His hair was red and very short. He was quite tall, and as he came near he seemed to look down on both of them.

Sandy had nothing to say, but Lyb went forward to meet him with her head in the air. "Who are you?" she asked, and Sandy felt sure she was playing at being an island empress.

"I'm Sig O'Hara," the boy said. "And I suppose you're the Hardwickses."

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Lyb bowed her head with a decidedly queenly motion, and the tall boy snickered. "What's eating you?" he asked. "You look stuffed."

Sandy grinned in spite of himself. Lyb did look silly when she put on an act this way. "Why are you down here?" she asked the boy, and her voice sounded as though she were speaking to a slave in chains.

The boy began to be irritated. "Why shouldn't I be down here?" he said. "I found this place yesterday, and it's lucky for you I was around. I put out the fire you dopes left behind you."

Sandy took a step forward. "You put out the fire?" he said. "You didn't see a couple of Indian ax heads, did you?"

The boy shook his head. "Didn't see anything except a fire built against two rocks, and I put that out."

Sandy looked at the boy curiously, and an unpleasant idea twisted and grew in his mind. Those were unusually perfect ax heads, and Sandy was quite sure in his own mind where he had left them. He started to speak, but Lyb was ahead of him. "Are you *sure* you didn't see a couple of ax heads?" she asked, but her suspicions were as clear as though she had accused the boy of stealing.





"You are trespassing," Lyb said majestically. "And I order you off my island."

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The boy got an angry red. "Of course not," he said. "Do you think I swiped 'em?"

Lyb shrugged her shoulders. "Trespassers might do anything."

"I'm not trespassing!"

"You are trespassing, and you were trespassing yesterday! That fire was in our field."

"Well, I'm not trespassing now."

The two pink spots showed on either side of Lyb's face, and Sandy knew that war was declared. "You *are* trespassing," Lyb said majestically. "And I order you off my island."

Sig O'Hara was so red that his hair looked pale and his freckles stood out like warts. "I don't take orders from anyone," he said.

"You'll take them from me," Lyb said, and Sandy squirmed. The boy took a step closer, and his greeny blue eyes glittered with anger.

"See here," he began, but just then there was a sudden wild snort across the river. All three turned, and Sandy saw that the boy had tied a small chestnut pony to a tree on the mainland. The pony tossed her head wildly, as though something were biting her. Finally, with a terrific jerk, she broke loose and dashed off with her head between her knees.

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"Whoa, Mliss!" Sig O'Hara shouted. "Whoa, girl!" He ran after her across the log. The horse raised her head once but she was wild with pain, and in a moment she was off again. "Whoa, girl!" Sig called. He nearly had her. His hand was just reaching up for the bridle when once more she threw up her head and was off. He called again and again, but she rushed off, weaving her way through the woods away from the Hardwickses.

"Serves him right," Lyb said, and burst out into loud and unqueenly laughter. Sig O'Hara never even turned around. His mind was only on getting back his horse.

They waited for several minutes, but neither Sig nor his horse turned up again. "Where do you suppose he came from?" Sandy asked when he was quite sure they were alone.

"I wouldn't know," Lyb said. "Maybe he's visiting someone in the village. I never saw him before."

"Do you really think he took the ax heads?" Somehow Sandy hated to think this tall red-haired boy was a thief. He was irritating, and he certainly had gotten Lyb's goat, but in spite of all that Sandy sort of liked him.

"Of course he took them," Lyb said, and led the

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way back across the fallen tree. "He lied about not trespassing on this island, didn't he? Why shouldn't he lie about the ax heads? It was written all over him."

Sandy followed her back through the patchwork river lands. As usual his eyes were on the ground, but he no longer had the slightest hope of getting his ax heads. Sig O'Hara didn't look like a thief, but he'd lied about trespassing when they'd caught him cold, so perhaps he was.

By the time they got through the woodlands both Lyb and Sandy had begun to worry about being late. In the old days no one had cared, but since Mother had been sick sometimes she got tired and cross and little things mattered. They ran up the farm hill, but then they heard the stable clock ring and knew that they still had fifteen minutes.

When they reached the porch Mother was sitting on the deck chair with a newly scrubbed twin guarding either side of her. "I've got two surprises for you," she said. It was plain to both of them that she wasn't cross in the least. "Go get washed up and I'll tell you what they are."

They washed, and Sandy slicked down his stiff hair, and then they hurried back to the porch. "Here's the first surprise," Mother said as the rattle-

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trap Ford turned round a bend in the driveway. "Father's coming home for lunch."

Sandy hurried down the steps to meet his father, but Lyb hung behind. "What's the second surprise?" she said, and her voice sounded a little disappointed. "Is it a really good one?"

"I'd call it good," Mrs. Hardwicke said, and pulled Spinney down into her lap. "It's neighbors. New neighbors. I understand that the Petchulaks have sold the place next door and that it's gone to a widower with a son your age. I think the name's O'Hara."

"O'Hara?" Lyb said, and looked over at Sandy. "O'Hara? Why, that must be the boy we saw this morning."

She would have said more, but just then Maggie came out to tell them lunch was ready. Spinney hung back to pat Tip, the fat cocker, but Spuggy dashed ahead and almost tripped up Sandy as he struggled to pull out his mother's chair.

"Thank you, Spuggy," Mrs. Hardwicke said, and at the same moment she smiled at Sandy so that he knew that she knew he had wanted to pull out her chair himself. Sandy looked at his mother as though now that she had really come back he could never

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see enough of her. Her lean delicate face was still pale, but her forehead no longer looked marbly white under her wavy brown hair. Sandy took the plate of steak that his father had carved and put it down. The steak, and the new peas, and candied sweet potatoes smelled marvelous. He began to eat, and as he bit into the tender juicy steak he felt suddenly happy. Everything, even the food, was better now that Mother was back home. He watched her as she cut up the twins' meat. Her hands were white and long fingered, and her engagement ring sparkled like a little star. "So you've met the O'Hara boy?" she said. "Did you see his father?"

Sandy opened his mouth to answer, but as usual Lyb was halfway through a sentence before he had started. "We were spared him," she said. "But the boy's a mess."

"What's the matter with him?" Mr. Hardwicke asked, coming into the conversation as he finished carving. "I thought the father was a very decent sort. He's a retired army officer who's coming here to start breeding horses. What's the matter with the boy?"

"He's just cheap, that's all. Cheap and fresh. A regular stableboy."

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"Lyb, you're a snob," Mrs. Hardwicke said sharply. "A perfectly hopeless snob."

Lyb wilted instantly, as she always did at any sharp word from her mother. Her nose got red and her eyes looked glassy, almost as though she might cry. Something had to be done, and Sandy plowed in. "We found a perfectly swell sort of island place," he said, "with an old shed on it." He turned to his father in the hope of keeping the conversation general. "Why don't we ever use the shed?" he asked. "It looked pretty good to me."

"Shed?" said Mr. Hardwicke. "Shed?" Then slowly he remembered. "Oh, on that little spit of land near where our land meets the Petchulaks'. We don't use it because it doesn't belong to us. I think that spit's part of the Peckham place or maybe the Petchulaks'. It isn't worth anything, I know. Not from anybody's penny pig."

Sandy looked across the table to see if Lyb had had the same idea as he had. She stared back at him, but she hadn't been paying attention.

Dessert came on the table, and Sandy finished his strawberry shortcake down to the last delicious morsel of whipped cream and squashed berry. If Sig O'Hara had been right about the island not

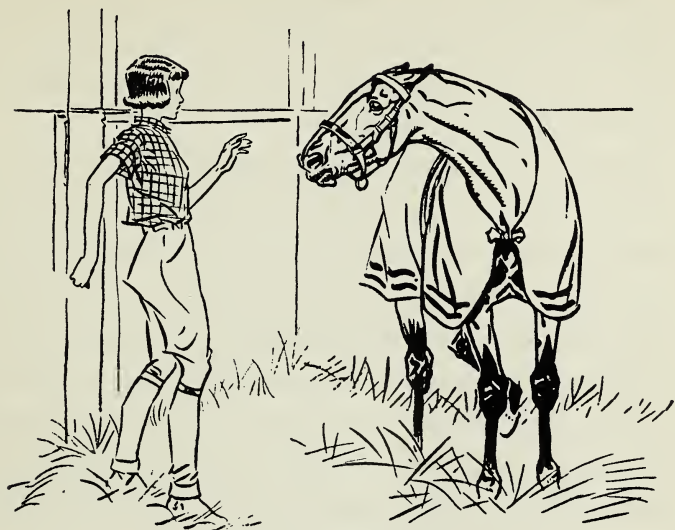
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being theirs he was probably right about not taking the ax heads. Sandy waited until they left the table and then hurried after Lyb. "Listen," he said. "You don't think O'Hara was right about not taking those ax heads?"

"Of course he wasn't. He just lied about them, that's all. They're probably in his pocket right this minute. Of course he took them."

Sandy went into the library and headed for the corner where the Indian books were kept. He felt thoroughly uncomfortable. Lyb thought that they had made a mistake about Sig O'Hara's stealing, too. She was just trying to convince herself when she talked that fast and looked the other way.

CHAPTER III: SPUGGY GOES RIDING



SEVERAL DAYS PASSED before the children got back to the island. Father was home for the week end and began work on a new chicken coop. Father wasn't as good at carpentry as he was at most things, but he loved it. The more he worked with the old uneven lengths of wood he had rescued from the woodshed the more cheerful he grew. Every day he came in a darker brown and with new hard-won callouses on his office hands.

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Both Lyb and Sandy would have liked to help hammer in the new shingles, but Father had other plans. "All the strawberries have to be picked," he said. "And Joe hasn't got time. I'd like you two to get them picked today."

Lyb groaned and watched Sandy and the twins carry up the new quart baskets from the barn cellar. She thought of protesting, but just then Mother came up to the barnyard on one of her short morning walks. Mother's dress still looked dreadfully loose, and she was out of breath even from the short hill up from the house. When she saw Lyb and Sandy she stopped and leaned against the white barnyard fence. "Are you two going to pick the strawberries?" she asked. "I think that's marvelous."

Lyb said nothing but picked up her tier of berry baskets. "We'll get 'em picked in no time," Sandy said.

"And we'll save the biggest ones for you," Spuggy added as he followed Sandy toward the garden.

That evening Lyb thought of going down to the island, but Sandy was out riding, and she didn't want to go down to that shaded, abandoned spot alone. She thought of going out riding herself, but when she looked at the stable clock it said half-past

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seven and she knew it was too late. She decided to give Sunny Jim a really good work-out tomorrow, and in the meantime she walked up the hill to give him a lump of sugar.

As she reached the big old-fashioned stable that had been built for carriage horses when Grandpa Hardwicke had bought Elm Top she saw Sandy come up the hill on Potato Pete. Pete was the combination ride-and-drive farm horse that Sandy rode when he wasn't needed to rake the hay or pull the cultivator. Pete's big feet and heavy neck were as clumsy as any plow horse, but Sandy rode him as carefully as though he had been a thoroughbred.

Right now he sponged Pete off and turned him into one of the square box stalls that Mother had had refloored and revarnished. "I had a swell ride," he said. "Why didn't you come?"

Lyb hung over the door of Sunny Jim's yellow box stall and said nothing. Sunny was a small silvery roan with a jet-black tail and markings that gave him a positive, impish look. Her hands fumbled nervously as she turned the brass ring that locked his box. Sunny hadn't done anything very wicked in the month and a half they had had him, and yet somehow Lyb always expected that he would. As

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she went into the stall she bolstered up her courage by thinking about Black Beauty and Rolland's horse Veillantif. After all, the horse was supposed to be the servant of mankind. She took a step nearer Sunny, but he put back his ears and bared his teeth. Sunny looked more like a boss than a servant!

Lyb held out her sugar and then backed out of the stall and hurried down the long barn. At the far end, near the wall where they hung their tack, Sandy was busy soaping his bridle. "Aren't you riding at all?" he asked.

Lyb started to answer, but just then she heard the sharp clatter of the bell with which Maggie called them to the house for meals. For once Lyb obeyed it instantly. She ran toward the house, calling over her shoulder to Sandy, "It's too late to ride. Besides, maybe the bell means that Mother wants me."

The next morning Sandy rode before breakfast, but Lyb slept late. When she finally got down Father had already left and Sandy was just starting down for the island. "Come down as soon as you can," he urged, and Lyb nodded.

"Be there right away," she said, and helped herself to a large helping of Maggie's good baked beans and crisp bacon.

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As soon as Lyb was through breakfast she went in to see her mother. Mrs. Hardwicke had finished her breakfast tray, and Lyb lifted it down from the bed and carried it out to the hall. Each morning now Mother looked browner and a little stronger. She was no longer someone you loved terribly but who was so remote and separate when you saw her in the hospital that you came away terrified. She was really Mother again, who scolded you when you looked messy and squeezed your hand tight when anything went really wrong.

Suddenly Mother smiled up at Lyb, and she looked almost as young and happy as she had in the old days before she had ever been sick. Lyb grinned back happily. Life was getting safe and sure again. The way it had been before Mother's illness had made Dad so rushed and worried that his big hands shook when he held up the newspaper and his jokes suddenly grew little unexpected pricks like the barb of a fishhook.

"In another two weeks I'll be up for breakfast and out riding," Mother said as though she read Lyb's thoughts. "You get Sunny Jim nice and quiet for me to start in on."

Lyb felt guilty when she thought of how she had

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put off riding Sunny. "I'm going to put on my jodhpurs right away," she said, "and later on take a good long ride."

She did put on her jodhpurs and went as far as the barn. Then she remembered her promise to Sandy and headed for the island. There would be plenty of time to ride after she came back, she told herself.

Lyb was nearly at the top of the hill that looked down on the river lands when she heard Spuggy.

It was the Narraganset Indian war whoop that Sandy had taught him because it was the real cry which the Pilgrims had heard. Spuggy had certainly profited by his lessons. Lyb heard his yell long before his short sturdy body rounded the corner by the big barn. He ran toward her, stumbling and falling through the long grass. "Wait," he shouted between whoops. "Wait. I want to talk to you."

Lyb looked back and saw that as usual, Spinney was not far behind her twin. While he drove headlong through the long grass she picked out a place where the hay had already been cut and reached Lyb almost as soon as Spuggy did. "We want to go riding," Spuggy said breathlessly. "Will you take us?"

Lyb looked down at the small upturned faces of

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the twins and then looked down the hill where the river lands spread out before her like an airplane map. "I can't take you now," she said. "I've promised to do something with Sandy."

"Can we do it too?"

"No, Spuggy, not this time. You and Spinney go and make a fort in the sand box, and I'll take you riding later."

Spinney gave a little sigh. "We've made so many forts," she said, and started to trot away on her small bare feet.

Spuggy was not so easily turned. "We're going to go with you!" he said, and took a step closer to Lyb. Spinney saw him, turned, and stood beside her twin.

"Pleathe, Lyb," she said politely. "We'd like to go, really."

Lyb looked at them in desperation and then had an idea. "I tell you what," she said. "You go and ask Joe to get the horses ready, and then when I'm through with Sandy I'll take you both for a ride."

"Promise?"

"Of course I promise."

Spuggy watched Lyb go on down the hill while Spinney sat right down where she was and began to pick daisies. Spuggy waited until Lyb was near the

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woods. "Whoo-ai-wooch!" he called once more. (3)
"If you forget, we'll just ride by ourselves."

Lyb waved her hand without speaking and hurried into the woods. She waited until she was nearly through and then she began to call, "Sandy! Sandy! Are you at the island?" There was no answer except her echo, and Lyb began to walk faster than ever.

She walked across the open pasture where they had built the fire and into the second wood lot. It wasn't until she was nearly through that she heard the clear "Whirr te whirr" of Sandy's signal whistle and knew that he had heard her.

Lyb hurried out on the river bank where she could look across at the island and saw Sandy half snoozing in the checkered sunlight. "Why didn't you answer me sooner?" she asked. "I've been calling for ages."

"I just heard you a sec ago," Sandy said. "I guess the trees make a sound break. It's lovely and quiet here."

Lyb walked across the fallen tree and stood beside Sandy. "I had trouble shaking the twins," she said. "But I finally got rid of 'em."

Sandy didn't seem very interested. "Listen how quiet it is," he said, and for a moment they stood quite still. There was no wind to stir the trees, and

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the water slid past silently. Once a crow cawed and there was the dull thud, thud of Tip's scratching himself, but these small sounds only intensified the stillness. "It's a knock-out, this place," Sandy said finally. "An absolute knock-out. What'll we call it?"

Lyb turned toward the huge buttonwood that shaded the shed at the far end of the island. "We might call it Buttonwood," she said. "Buttonwood Island, and we won't tell a soul about it."

"Sig O'Hara knows about it already," Sandy said. "And Spuggy's got some idea."

"Well, we won't let them on," Lyb said firmly. "And maybe they won't want to come anyway."

Sandy stretched out luxuriously in the fresh clean grass. Of course they would want to come. Anyone would want to come to a place as perfect as this. His eye fell on some swamp milkweed that the Indians had used for making rope, and he wondered vaguely what name the Indians had given to this place.

Lyb began to walk quickly about the island with long even strides. "We ought to measure it all," she said. "So as to know how to divide it. We'll want a special fireplace, and a place for swimming, maybe, and a picnic ground."

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Sandy didn't really listen. As far as he was concerned the island was partitioned off already. He thought of the plans he had studied of an Indian village. At one end would be the long house with the fire just beyond the door. Beyond that would be wigwams, or bark huts if it was a more permanent village.

Lyb was in no mood to let Sandy daydream. She stooped over him with restless, pinching fingers. "Wake up," she said, "and help me build a fire-place."

Sandy sighed and slowly picked himself up. He was almost sorry that he hadn't discovered the island by himself. Things were fun sometimes when Lyb was around, and often exciting, but they were never, never peaceful.

"You'd better start with the stones for the fire-place," Lyb said, and led the way toward the old barn. "There were a lot back here somewhere."

Directly behind the barn they found lines of stone that must once have been a cellar wall. The stones still made a rectangle, and the earth between them had been dug out.

"It's nearly square," Lyb said as she paced around the rocks. "And look, Sandy, here are some old lilac

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bushes! This must have been the door, right by the barn. Oh, Sandy, this *is* exciting!"

She hurried once more around the outline of the cellar. "It must have been awfully small," she said. "A tiny little house and a neat little barn." She glanced at the battered gray barn as she spoke, but it was almost as hard to imagine it neat and tight as to imagine the clothes on a scarecrow as Father's best suit.

"Do you suppose the house belonged to the barn?" Lyb asked, and Sandy nodded.

"I'm sure it did," he said, clearing the dry brambles from some of the rocks. "It probably belonged to the same people who built the bridge. I guess it burned down and then they cleared out."

Lyb was thrilled. She hurried to the center of the cellar where some crumbling rocks marked the chimney place. "Look, Sandy," she said. "We'll build the fireplace right here. Right over the spot where they had their fires. We'll rekindle their hearth. We'll relight the home fires!"

Sandy, whose mind was more used to traveling back into times gone by, was less thrilled. To someone who had already peopled the whole region with roving tribes of Podunks and Pocassetts the finding

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of one white man's cellar was a minor event. He tugged awkwardly at one of the flat side stones that would do for a fireplace. "Give me a hand with this, will you?" he asked, and Lyb flew to help him.

Lyb was enthusiastic, and Sandy was definite as to how a fireplace should be built, but neither of them made much headway in building. Sandy moved one rock slowly and deliberately into place. The minute he got it where he wanted it, it dropped flat unless he held it in position. He tried again and again, until finally Lyb became thoroughly cross at his persistence.

She jerked the rock toward her and tried to push another into place with her foot. She worked faster than Sandy but no more effectively. The rocks still lay in an unbalanced heap when they heard a sound across on the mainland.

There was a movement in the trees, and they both straightened up. The next instant the crackle of underbrush was louder. There was a streak of bright blue and reddish brown. The next moment Sunny Jim came out on the river bank with Spuggy on his back!

"Spuggy!" Lyb called, but he never heard her. He sat humped forward like an unhappy monkey.

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His two hands clutched the reins and his short legs stretched hopelessly toward the long stirrups.

Sunny turned down the river bank where the grass was deeper. He leaned down to graze and nearly jerked Spuggy out of the saddle. "Pull his head up," Lyb called, but it was too late.

There was a loud imperious whinny from the woods. Sunny Jim braced his legs and his nostrils spread. He jerked up his head and answered in a whinny still more shrill.

"Hold on, Spuggy!" Lyb shouted, but it was no use. As Sig O'Hara's horse came through the woods Sunny Jim plunged. For one instant it seemed as though Spuggy might stay on. He teetered forward, gripping the saddle pommel. Lyb's heart contracted and she stood rooted to the ground.

"Sunny!" Sandy shouted. Tip barked wildly. The next instant Spuggy's grip broke and he crashed headfirst toward the ground!

CHAPTER IV: SIG CALLS A BLUFF



THE NEXT FEW MINUTES were nightmares. Sunny Jim reared! His feet came down deadly close to Spuggy! Lyb's heart seemed to stop. She plunged across the log, tripped on the bank, and rushed on again. She would never reach Spuggy. Never! He would be killed!

She dashed along the river bank, but Sig O'Hara was ahead of her. He had jumped off his horse, dropped the reins over one arm, and now he lifted

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Spuggy off the ground. The minute that Lyb came up Spuggy began to cry. "I hurted myself," he wailed, and threw his arms around Lyb's neck. Sig waited until he was sure that Lyb had him and then he dashed off after Sunny.

Lyb could not speak, but now Sandy was beside her. "Where'd you hurt yourself?" he asked. "Spuggy, where does it hurt?"

Spuggy pointed to the great red lump that was already forming on his forehead. Lyb sat down with Spuggy on her lap. She rubbed his lump gently, and her lips and mouth felt dry. "Stand up, Spuggy," she said, and the frightened little boy did as he was told.

Lyb felt him all over and then, swallowing hard, pulled him back into her lap. Spuggy wasn't killed. By some miracle he wasn't even badly hurt. "Get some water," she told Sandy. "We'll bathe the bump with cold water."

Sandy looked around for something in which to carry the water. There was nothing, and he began groping through his pockets for a handkerchief. "I haven't got one," he began, and at that moment Sig O'Hara came back through the woods. He led Sunny Jim with one hand and his own chestnut mare with the other. "We got him," he said, and his

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freckled face grinned like a Cheshire cat. "He'd hardly gone any distance, and he just stood cropping grass as if he wanted to be caught. I didn't even have to tie up Mliss to nab him."

Sandy still searched about hopelessly in his pockets for a handkerchief. "Spuggy bumped himself," he said, "and we wanted to put on water."

Sig O'Hara fastened the two horses and then he searched for a handkerchief. He didn't have one either, but he cupped his hands tight and brought up enough water for Lyb to slop on Spuggy's forehead. "I didn't think he'd be hurt," he said, examining Spuggy's bruise. "People never are hurt when they fall the way he did."

Lyb bathed the bump as best she could, and for a moment Spuggy accepted it gratefully. Then when the water began to trickle down his neck he wriggled himself free. "Sunny Jim's a bad horse," Spuggy said. "He shouldn't have dropped me."

For the first time since the fall Lyb took a deep breath. A feeling of relief, and guilt, and sudden inexplicable irritation swept over her. "Why'd you ride Sunny in the first place?" she asked Spuggy. "You know you aren't supposed to ride either of the horses alone, least of all Sunny."

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Spuggy stood first on one foot and then on the other as he rubbed his bruise. His face was still wet and teary, but he was no longer frightened. "You didn't come and you didn't come," he said, "so I just wented."

"Did Joe let you?"

"He didn't *not* let me. He left the horses all fixed and then he went down to the house."

At last Lyb understood. Joe had bridled the horse and then had left him in the stable. "How in the world did you ever get on?" she asked. Spuggy straightened up.

"Spinney said I couldn't, but it was easy. Easy as anything."

"I'd like to see you do it again," said Sig O'Hara, and they all turned to look at him. "As soon as we get this pony exercised you show us how you did it. You always want to get on after a fall, you know."

Lyb started to speak and then stopped. She wanted Sig to understand that Sunny was her pony and at the same time she didn't want to ride him. She looked where Sig had tied the two horses, and for the moment Sunny seemed to be grazing as calmly as a white lamb. Just at that moment Mliss moved a few inches nearer, and Sunny's ears flattened and

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his yellow teeth bared. With that Lyb's mind was made up. "Spencer's much too young to ride Sunny," she said. "I think he'd better go straight back to the house and have a good rest."

Spuggy looked as though he wanted to bite Lyb and at the same time he looked relieved. Sig didn't seem to notice him. "I should think you'd want to ride the pony off in one of these open fields," he said, turning to Sandy. "He's too much for your kid brother to ride until he's been exercised."

Sandy looked so startled even his big ears seemed to quiver. "M-m-me ride him?" he said. "I—I—that is——"

"I'll ride him!" Lyb heard her own voice as though it belonged to someone else. "I'll ride him right now." The voice sounded firm and resolute and not a bit like the shivering, quaking person in Lyb's heart.

"A good ride's what he needs," Sig said, and led him out into the open field away from the island. "As long as your brother's lost his nerve I guess you'd better ride him." He looked at Sandy with an expression that would have dared Lyb into trying anything, but Sandy only looked down at his own sneakers and said nothing.

Lyb picked up the reins and hoped that her hands

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and knees wouldn't give her away by shaking. Her heart pounded and it was hard to breathe. She was terrified, but now she could not turn back. He mustn't know, she told herself. He mustn't ever guess that I'm scared too.

Sig O'Hara held the horse, and Lyb got on. Sunny Jim's back was humped. His ears were back. He felt like a great hairy bullet that might explode at any moment. Lyb touched him gingerly, as though he were made of dynamite. "Let him go," she said, and prayed that Sunny Jim wouldn't run away.

Sunny needed no orders to begin. He trotted hard and fast around the field. His black feet lifted almost to his chin in square, springy, hackney steps. Sandy and Spuggy waited to see them start and then disappeared into the woods. Only Sig stayed on, chewing a piece of grass while he watched Lyb with narrowed, professional eyes.

By the time Lyb was halfway around the field she felt better. Her knees began to find their depth in the saddle and it seemed less slippery. She gripped hard and felt almost secure. At that moment Sunny Jim jumped!

Lyb had her grip or she would have fallen. Sunny had taken a wide sideways leap at the place where





"You've got to kick him," Sig said. "You've got to show him who's boss!"

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Sig's horse was tied. Lyb looked at Sig, but he said nothing, his eyes still on herself and the pony. Old Tip, the cocker, came out through the woods, and once more Sunny jumped as though he had never seen a dog before.

Lyb trotted on, but her security was quite gone. She felt loose and helpless in the saddle. She felt Sunny Jim's back hump again and knew he was gathering for a buck. He fought for his head, and she struggled with the reins, giving and taking to gain control.

They passed Sig's horse again, and again Sunny Jim jumped. Lyb jounced forward almost out of the saddle. Her nose hit Sunny's bristly mane and her eyes watered. "Give him a kick!" Sig's voice seemed to be right in her ear. "Give him a kick! Can't you see he's bluffing?"

Somehow Lyb got herself back into the saddle. The last thing she wanted to do was to give Sunny a kick and maybe make him go faster. "Whoa, pet, whoa!" She struggled, breathless and panting, her hair in her eyes, her shirt torn at the shoulder.

She was nearly round to Sig's horse again when she heard his voice. "You've got to kick him," Sig said. "You've got to show him who's boss!"

SIG CALLS A BLUFF

Lyb dug in her knees with every ounce of her strength. She felt Sunny's round body move, preparing for the jump. "Get on there," she shouted, and just as Sunny swept out into a wild curve her heel came down hard and firm against his side.

Sunny lay back his ears. For a moment it seemed as though he might rear. Lyb kept her hands low and steady. "Get on there!" she ordered. "Beat it!" Still Sunny's ears lay back. He swerved out from a big rock he had passed a dozen times, but this time Lyb was ready for him. Her heel caught him just as he moved, and she forced him back into the circle. "Keep going," she said. "Keep going there!" Sunny Jim kept on going.

From then on it was as easy as unrolling a ball of wool. Once or twice Sunny Jim made a weak pretense of shying, but each time Lyb was ready for him. By the end of a half hour Sunny trotted as meekly as a small circus horse. He looked as though he had never even thought of shying.

For the last ten minutes Lyb posted easily and lightly to the trot. The blood tingled in her veins, and she felt more alive than she had ever felt before in her life. Finally, when Sunny's fat pepper-and-salt neck was dark with sweat, Lyb patted him and

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pulled him down to a walk. She stopped right beside Sig O'Hara and grinned down at him.

Sig took Sunny's bridle and patted his soft gray nose and his hard, reddish, roan cheek. "You did a good job," he said. "He's a clever little cuss."

Lyb's pride swelled out like a wind-filled sail. "It's easy, really," she said. "Just give him a kick and send him along if he fusses. He doesn't really mean anything."

Sig looked straight at Lyb, but his greenish blue eyes showed no change of expression. "You did a good job," he said. "It takes nerve to ride any horse *when you're scared to death.*"

For a moment Lyb was furious. She got off Sunny's back, and somehow her anger faded. She felt so really well, so thoroughly pleased with herself at riding Sunny when Sandy had been too scared, that she could afford to be generous. She watched Sig as he rubbed Sunny down with a handful of leaves. She saw the quick expert motions of his left hand, and it occurred to her that she could no more fool Sig than Sunny could ever again fool her. "You were nice to stay," she said pleasantly. "Especially after all that fuss about the island. It seems—well, it seems the island doesn't belong to us after all."

SIG CALLS A BLUFF

Sig's mouth hung open as though he were catching flies. "It doesn't belong to you?" he said. "Well, then, who does it belong to? It's not part of the land the Petchulaks kept, because I rode over there last night and asked 'em. Father says it definitely isn't ours."

Lyb wanted to ask more questions, but just then they heard the sound of voices. Sandy and Spuggy came out of the woods with a new bow and some arrows that Sandy had made for Spuggy. Lyb stopped talking right away. There was no point in telling Spuggy about the island if he'd come so close and not noticed it.

Right now Spuggy's mind was entirely on Sunny Jim. "Sunny looks very hot," he said, hunting for some means of escape. "I don't think I'd better ride him."

Sandy looked uncomfortable and muttered something about not making Spuggy ride, but Lyb and Sig were unrelenting. Lyb held the pony's bridle while Sig held out the long stirrup. "Show us how you got on," he dared. "I bet you never did it all by yourself."

"I did so," Spuggy said, and with that he pulled himself slowly up on the long stirrup. He pulled and

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hauled just as though he were scrambling up a ladder, but finally he got there. "It was easier in the stable," he panted. "Much easier. There was a big block."

Sig undid his own horse and swung easily into the saddle. "Suppose Mliss and I go ahead," he said. "We'll break the path for you."

Lyb held onto the bridle, and Sandy stayed close beside Spuggy's fat knees. "You look fine," he said once. "Just like a Sioux Indian riding without stirrups."

They were through the second wood lot and in the home fields when they saw Joe. Instead of his usual slow, timeless stride he was on the run, and behind him, tripping and falling in her efforts to keep up, was Spinney.

The minute Joe saw them he stopped short. "Well!" he said, and wiped the sweat off his sunburned forehead. "I'm sure glad to see Spugs is all right. From what Spinney said I reckoned he'd taken Sunny Jim out alone."

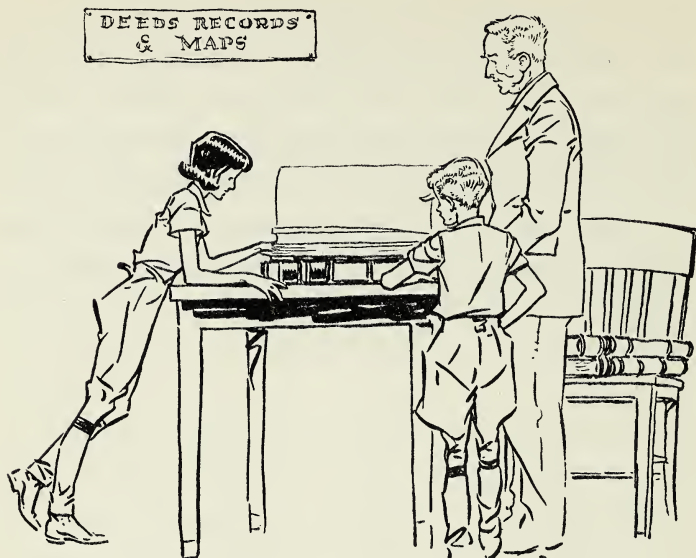
For the first time that day Spuggy sat up straight on horseback. "I did take him out," he said. "I did 'cause Spinney dared me."

Just at that moment Spinney caught up with them.

SIG CALLS A BLUFF

She was running across the short stubbly grass on her bare feet. There were little beads of sweat on her face and her mouth was pinched with pain, but she didn't cry. She didn't stop until she reached Sunny Jim. Then, when she saw that Spuggy was really all right, she burst into tears. "Thpuggy," she wailed, and her lisp was more pronounced than ever. "Thpuggy, why will you do things wifout the two of uth?"

CHAPTER V: LAND ON THE RECORDS



AT THE END of another week Lyb wondered how they had ever lived without the island. It was the only place near the farm that seemed wild, and free, and yet at the same time protected and their own. Here no one could disturb their plans because the land needed to be plowed or seeded or because they might bother the cows. Lyb stood on the river bank, and as she looked across at the island she felt like a queen surveying her most beloved country.

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The buttonwood tree had reached its majestic fullness in the past few days. The grass was more lush and deep than ever, and the two shining thorn-apple trees at the other end of the island were as round and perfect as the trees in a miniature village. "Oh, lovely island, dew beset by pearl," Lyb began, but the poem didn't come out right, and she put her mind on other things.

She had borrowed Joe's scythe, and now she lugged it across the fallen log to the island. She wanted to make a path leading up from the river to the shed, but it was hard, slow work. She thought of how much better it would be to have a smooth passageway than to stumble through the tall grass, but it was easier to think about it than to make it. After a few minutes she gave it up and handed the scythe over to Sandy. "You try it," she said, and sat down to rest.

Sandy worked awkwardly, but he kept at it until his hands were blistered and he had to stop and rub his aching back. Finally Lyb felt guilty at seeing him work so long. "You've done a lot," she said, looking at the uneven path he had made halfway from the river bank to the shed. "Better stop and rest."

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Sandy said nothing but wrapped his handkerchief around his sore hand and kept on working. When Sandy started something he was like a mole who couldn't stop digging. Right now he kept on swinging the heavy blade until he reached the edge of the river.

When he was all through Lyb raked up the grass in her arms, and then they stood looking down at the river. For a moment Lyb let the cool air blow through her cotton shirt, but it was not cooling enough. "I'm going in swimming!" she said. "Want to come?"

Sandy looked at the oozing mud of the river and shook his head. "Too dirty," he said, but Lyb knew he was thinking about water snakes.

"Don't be a baby," she said, and jerked off her shoes and socks.

"Are you really going in with your clothes on?" Sandy said, and now Lyb knew that she couldn't change her mind.

"Of course," she said, and picked the place where the river looked deepest. One, two, three, she told herself, and the next minute she was in the water.

She splashed out bravely for a stroke or two. Her arm hit something cool and slimy, and she jerked

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back as though she had been bitten. The next moment she saw that it was only a submerged log and paddled on again, feeling very foolish.

Lyb swam around for a moment or two more, but the water was too black and oily to be pleasant. In another minute she struggled through the reeking mud and stood up on the island, dripping and uncomfortable. "It's no good," she said, and picked up her shoes and socks. "Too kind of oily."

Still Sandy said nothing but only picked up the scythe and slowly followed Lyb home.

The next day Sandy was very stiff, but he got up and rode early. When Lyb had exercised Sunny they both headed for the island. Now that they were not cutting the grass the place seemed almost chilly, and Lyb wondered why she had ever wanted to swim. Still, it was good to have done it and not go around wishing you had, the way Sandy did.

Lyb looked around for a place to sunbathe and found a perfect spot at the tip of the island, just out of the shadow of the buttonwood tree. There was a flat ledge of rock that looked out over the river, and it was big enough for both of them to lie on. They covered the rock with the fresh hay and lay down in the sunshine.

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"This is swell," Sandy said as he stretched his stiff body into a comfortable position.

Lyb took short ecstatic whiffs of the new hay. It was more than swell, it was perfect. She stretched herself out flat with her head beyond the rock. Now she could breathe in the rich, earthy smell of the river bank, the dark smell of the river itself, and the perfume of some wild honeysuckle, as well as the hay. Sandy curled up as though he were going to sleep, but for once Lyb did not disturb him. She edged forward a few inches so that her arms were on the rock and her face was over the water. It was a marvelous spot, almost as separate and water-bound as the prow of a ship. Lyb watched the slow river curling and uncurling until she could almost feel the island moving with the rise and pitch of a sailing vessel.

It was past noon when they finally tore themselves away from the island, but Sig had not shown up. On several of the other days when the Hardwicks had spent all their time on the island Sig had only been there an hour or two because his father kept him busy at home. Lyb wasn't entirely sorry. Somehow it was easier to be the island queen with only Sandy around than with Sig there too. Sig had been nice about Sunny, but Lyb wasn't sure that he'd

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understand how a queen's subject should act. "I guess Sig's busy exercising," she said out loud. "When his father's away he's got a lot of horses to ride."

Sandy nodded and tried braiding some long grass into an Indian mat. "He'd ride anything," he said. "But he likes Mliss best."

"Of course he does," Lyb said. "Anybody'd like the horse he rides all the time the best. Look at the way I love Sunny."

She picked up a spear of dandelion to chew, and it never occurred to her to remember that she had ever been afraid of Sunny. She had ridden him faithfully now for the past week, and he was hers as much as Traveller was Lee's or Bellerophon Napoleon's. You just had to master a horse, that was all; there was nothing more to it.

For almost a week they didn't see Sig, but there were signs of his handiwork. One day they found the fireplace that they had struggled with neatly finished off, and beside it was a note. Sandy bent down to look at the stonework, and Lyb read the letter. It was written in a hand that seemed almost as scrawly and messy as the twins'. "Dear Hardwickses," Lyb read, "I've been doing some riding for my old man

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but I'll meet you at the island early tomorrow. I've got a really swell idea. Yours truly, Sig."

"What d'you suppose his idea is?" Lyb asked, but Sandy looked as though he hadn't been listening.

"I wish we hadn't had that row with Sig the day we found this place," he said. "Maybe he still thinks we think it's our island."

Lyb shook her head and felt comfortably superior. "Of course he doesn't," she said. "I told him the next day it wasn't ours, and he said it wasn't his or the Petchulaks'."

Sandy sat back on his haunches, and as he stared at Lyb he looked more like a surprised rabbit than ever. "Doesn't belong to the O'Haras or the Petchulaks?" he said. "Then who does it belong to?"

Lyb shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know," she said. "But what dif does it make?"

"It makes a lot of difference," Sandy said as they climbed up the hill toward home. "We ordered Sig off and he ordered us off, but if it really belongs to somebody else they can kick us off any time they want to."

Lyb thought about it for a moment, but now that they had things straightened out with Sig it seemed

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unimportant. It was too bad the island didn't belong to them, but when you were down there you felt as though you owned it anyway. As long as nobody bothered them it didn't matter.

By the time they reached the house Lyb had forgotten all about the ownership of the island, but Sandy had an annoyingly one-track mind. He kept on worrying about who owned it, just the way he had stubbornly kept on hunting for his lost ax heads long after Lyb had given them up. Right after supper he began to rummage through some old geodetic survey maps that had belonged to his grandfather. He spread them out on a card table and studied them until Mrs. Hardwicke told him it was time to go to bed.

"Couldn't I just work on these a little longer?" he pleaded.

"Not even a minute," Mrs. Hardwicke said, and her voice had the sharp high note that meant she was overtired. Sandy started to get up, and at the same moment his mother relented. "Leave the table and your papers just the way they are," she said. "I'll see nobody disturbs them."

Lyb and Sandy said good night and went slowly up the stairs. "Mademoiselle or Miss Mutch would

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have made you put all that stuff away," Lyb said when they reached the landing. "You'd have wasted a lot of time getting the papers out all over again."

Sandy grinned and ran his fingers through his light hair. "And nobody's dusted my museum since she left," he said. "We'd better have that celebration yet."

They passed the twins' rooms, and Lyb looked in to see Spuggy fast asleep with one round freckled leg hanging out of the bed. "We'll have the celebration," she said, "but we'd better chain up the twins and Pooker first."

The next morning when Lyb got down to breakfast Sandy was already talking to Father about the river property. For once Father's watch wasn't out on the dining-room table and he didn't seem to be in a hurry. "As I remember, a lot of our land used to belong to some people called Askew," he said. "Could it have belonged to them?"

Sandy shook his head. "Not possibly," he said. "I found it on the map, and most of the river land belonged to people called Peckham."

"Good for the old sleuth," Mr. Hardwicke said, but now he looked really pleased. "Of course it belonged to the Peckhams. Most likely the island

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was theirs too. Seems to me I remember they owned that old barn."

"Could we look it up somewhere?" Sandy asked as Lyb helped herself to fried hominy and maple syrup.

"Why, of course. You could look it up at the town records. George Heinrich, the clerk, is a nice old chap."

As soon as they had all finished their breakfast Mr. Hardwicke went off to the train and Lyb and Sandy hurried down to the island. It was so early that the dew still sparkled on the spider webs, but Sig was there ahead of them. He stood on the edge of the island with Mliss right beside him like a pet dog.

"How'd you ever get her across?" Lyb asked, and wondered why she hadn't thought of taking Sunny.

"We forded," Sig said, and showed them Mliss's hoof marks at the edge of the island. "There's a place where it's so shallow you can walk right over. And it's quite gravelly and hard."

"Maybe the Indians used——" Sandy began, but Sig cut him short to hurry them up to the barn. "Listen," he said, and his voice grew high with ex-

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citement. "Have you really looked at this place?"

The Hardwicks stared up at the gray rafters without understanding. Sig strode around the shed, looking first at this and then at that. "Look at those beams," he said. "Look at those uprights. Sound as a nut. This barn's a knock-out."

Lyb looked up to where the sky shone through the holes in the roof in bright starlike patches. "How about those?" she said, but Sig never stopped his wild pacing around the barn.

"Nothing to it," he said. "Your uncle Sigourney could patch those in an afternoon. This barn's swell, I tell you. All it needs is a little work."

"But what are you going to use it for?" Sandy asked.

For the first time Sig stood still. "That's the big idea," he said. "That's what I wrote you about. We'll use it for horses. If we put Mliss and Sunny and Sandy's old cow in here nobody'd find 'em. Nobody in the world'd find 'em; not Pat Ryan, or my old man, or anybody, unless we wanted 'em to."

For one second Lyb stared at Sig. His eyes glistened with excitement and his freckles stood out more than ever. Suddenly Lyb was excited too. "It's a wow," she breathed. "Sig O'Hara, it's an absolute wow."

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"We'll fix up the barn and nobody'll know about it but us!"

"That's the idea," Sig said. "We can get a few tie ropes and a bucket, and we'll make a bin for oats."

"And saddle racks. It ought to be easy to make saddle racks."

"Of course," Sig agreed. "And we'll water 'em in the river if it's clean enough. And we'll have regular stable rules——"

They could have gone on for hours batting ideas back and forth if it hadn't been for Sandy. "We don't own the place," he said clearly. "No point working on it until we're sure we won't be thrown off."

Both Lyb and Sig felt like choking Sandy, but he was quite unconcerned. "We could find out who owns the land from the town records," he said. "It used to belong to some people called Peckham."

"Oh, let's start fixing the shed now," Lyb coaxed. "We could look it all up after."

"It isn't our land," Sandy said stubbornly. "We've got to find out who owns it."

"But what's the point if nobody cares?" Sig asked, and now his eyes narrowed and his face reddened the way they had that first angry day on the island.

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"What's the point? What's the big idea? It'll just take time from building."

"We've got to find out," Sandy said, and he made one of his queer little designs on the earth floor of the barn. "We've got to be sure nobody'd mind."

"When are the records open?" Lyb asked finally. If Sig got mad and Sandy got stubborn they wouldn't get anywhere, and the idea of fixing up the shed was too good to waste. "When can we see the old things?"

"You can see 'em all day today. Dad told me George Heinrich would be in that place under town hall."

"We'll go there right now, then," Sig said suddenly. "You get your horses and meet me on Pocono Road."

For a shadow of a second Lyb hesitated. Going to the village meant taking Sunny out on the main road, and that was something she hadn't tried. She looked up into Sig's greenish, questioning eyes. "What's the matter?" he said, and nodded impatiently toward Sandy. "D'you still feel about Sunny the way he does?"

"Of course not!" Lyb's head jerked up and her chin went out. "We'll be out on the road before you are."

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Lyb thought they would never get up to the barn and get the two horses saddled. It seemed Sandy was slower than ever, but finally he was ready and they rode out to the Pocono Road. The moment they left their own driveway they saw Sig waiting for them down the road. He'll canter up to us and Sunny'll buck, Lyb thought, and for the second time that morning she had a quick flash of fear.

Lyb dug her knees deep into the saddle. Now he'll rush and Sunny'll buck. She kept her grip, but Sig rode up to them as sedately as an old man.

"Howdy," he said. "You did a quick job. I went all the way back to the house to get my fly swish."

He flicked his long horsehair swish at a green horsefly on Mliss's neck. The first time Sunny didn't notice it, nor the second. The third time he put back his ears, but Lyb was ready for him. Sig flicked again, but when Sunny started to move Lyb held him onto his course and gave him a short sharp kick to make him behave. Instantly Sunny's ears relaxed and he walked along like a tame donkey.

Lyb gave a little sigh that was a mixture of pride and relief. Sunny Jim was under her thumb for good and all. Of course it was partly Sig's advice, but it was also because she no longer had to ride alone or

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just with Sandy. Lyb settled back comfortably in the saddle and eased her tense legs. She wasn't so sure that she liked having Sig on the island, but there was no doubt about his being a help out riding.

They reached Berkely village, which consisted of one long elm-lined street. Once, as they came near the square little town hall, a car shot out from behind one of the neat white houses. Sunny's ears pointed, but Lyb hurried him along and he made no further move. Lyb patted his fat neck, and Sig nodded approvingly. "You've got him now," he said. "He's a good pony for anyone that isn't scared of his own shadow the way Sandy is."

For one single second Lyb flamed with family pride. How dared Sig O'Hara say such a thing just because Sandy hadn't wanted to ride Sunny? She turned to Sig, and just at that moment she caught a glimpse of Sandy. He was poking along on Potato Pete's broad back, and his face looked dull and almost expressionless. Lyb shrugged her shoulders. Sometimes Sandy was hopeless. If he wouldn't stand up for himself there was no point in anybody else's fighting for him.

They reached the town hall and saw that old Mr. Heinrich was sitting on a bench outside, watching

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the town go by. "You talk to him," Sandy said, but for the first time Sig drew back.

"Not me," he said. "You do it."

"I'll talk to him," Lyb said, and while Sig held the horses she walked up to Mr. Heinrich as though she had been looking up town records all her life.

"If it isn't too much trouble, we'd like to look at the records," she said. "The one that would show us about that little island of land between our place and the O'Haras'."

"Which ones?" Mr. Heinrich said, and smiled down at her as though she had been Spinney.

"Why, the ones for the land on the river near our place and the Petchulaks' and the farm Mr. O'Hara's just bought."

Mr. Heinrich looked puzzled, but now Sandy came to the rescue. "It's old Peckham property," he said. "We want to find out who owns it now."

"Peckham place," Mr. Heinrich said, and pushed his old straw hat back from his forehead. "Peckham, did you say? Well, that gives us something to work on."

He led them down into the small cellar room where the records were kept. The place was chilly and damp and smelled of must. Mr. Heinrich

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polished his glasses, fumbled over a big key ring, and unlocked the cupboard in which the books were kept. "Grantor or grantee?" he said.

"Grant which?" Lyb asked, and wondered what he was talking about.

"Grantor," Sandy said suddenly. "The Peckhams must have been if they sold the place."

He leaned against the big deal table on which Mr. Heinrich put down one of the big volumes, and together they thumbed through the pages. Peck, Petchulak, Pesson, but there was no sign of Peckham.

"Let's try grantee," Sandy said. "If they didn't sell it they must have bought it sometime."

They looked through one record book after another, and finally in one that looked as old as Domesday Book itself they came across the name Peckham. "Peckham, Phineas. Know all ye men by these presents that Phineas Peckham, residing in the town of Berkely, in Fairbrook County, doth remise, release, and forever quit claim unto Jonas Drury, his heirs and assigns, that wood and meadow land bounded to the north by town land, to the south by the Black River, heretofore known as Pootatuck Hollow——"

"Pootatuck Hollow!" Sandy gasped. "That means

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it may have been old Indian property. Boy, what would Uncle Rob say!" He read on, hesitating over the stiff, old-fashioned phrases and the sloping script.

Once Mr. Heinrich peered over his glasses at the records. "Pootatuck Hollow," he read over Sandy's shoulder. "Well, that don't signify. That whole region was called Pootatuck. The bit of land you're interested in was just a fraction of what was conveyed here."

Sandy went on reading the record. "What's a stone monument?" he asked once.

"Pile of field stones, most likely," George Heinrich said. "Or maybe one shaft dug deep into the ground."

Sandy reread the record slowly and carefully while Lyb shivered in the damp cellar air and edged toward the door. The sun shone in a yellow streak from the narrow grilled half window, but it gave no warmth. "Who owns the place now?" Lyb asked. "The Indians don't still own it."

Sandy stared down at the old record. "It looks as though the Peckhams sold all their land except that piece by the river. As far as I can make out they must still own it. Do they live anywhere around here?"

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It appeared that Mr. Heinrich was as anxious to get back into the sunshine as Lyb was. He had put back all of the volumes except the one Sandy was holding. "Looks like they still own it," he said, and reached for the last book. "The river land's never been worth much, and I reckon it didn't sell."

"But do they still live around here?"

Mr. Heinrich rubbed the bald spot on the back of his head. "Peckham," he said. "Peckham. Seems to me Miss Lucy Peckham as went over to New Haven to live with her niece back in 1910 was the last Peckham I ever heard tell of. Wouldn't wonder but what Miss Lucy still owns it." He pulled the last book almost out from under Sandy's thin arms and led the way back into the sunshine.

Lyb blinked and took a deep breath of the warm dry air. It was good to be out of that cellar, and she wanted to start for home. "Well, thanks a lot," she said to Mr. Heinrich. "You were awfully nice to help us."

"Thank you," Sandy said, and Mr. Heinrich settled back on his comfortable bench.

They ran down the slope to where Sig held the horses. "Did you find out?" he asked. "Who owns the place? Can we use it? Will anyone kick us out?"

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"It belongs to a Miss Peckham," Lyb said, as though she had done all the research herself.

"And she hasn't been around here for over thirty years," Sandy added.

"Three cheers!" Sig said, and swung himself lightly into the saddle. "If she hasn't even lived here for years she certainly won't care who uses the island."

They turned down a narrow dirt road that took them immediately out of town. They walked the horses downhill while Sig and Lyb made plans. "We'll have a regular riding club," Sig said.

"With club colors and maybe a uniform with buttons," Lyb added.

"Swell, but what'll we call it?"

For the first time both Lyb and Sig turned to Sandy. "What'll we call it?" Lyb asked, and now she could hardly stay in the saddle with excitement. "Berkely Hunt Club?"

"Let's call it the Buttonwood Island Riding Club," Sandy suggested. "Or maybe the Indian Hollow Club. D'you realize that island was part of the very land the Peckhams got from the Podunks?"

"Buttonwood Club sounds fine," said Lyb, and Sig agreed.

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They walked along for a few more yards, but now Lyb was quiet. If you had a club someone had to be the head of it, and Lyb very much wanted to be that person. Sandy wouldn't be any trouble, but she wondered about Sig. "Who—who'll be President?" she asked quickly, but Sig only laughed and flicked a fly off Mliss's neck.

"Hunts don't have presidents," he said. "They have a master of foxhounds. And if this is a riding club it ought to be like a hunt."

Lyb looked hard at Sunny Jim's black-tipped ears. Sig had been decent about the island when she had almost accused him of stealing Sandy's ax heads; he had been more than decent about showing her how to ride Sunny. She took a deep breath. "You'll be the Master of Foxhounds," she said. "You know more about horses than either of us."

"Well, you be the Secretary-Treasurer, then," Sig said. "And the Honorary Whip. They always have those."

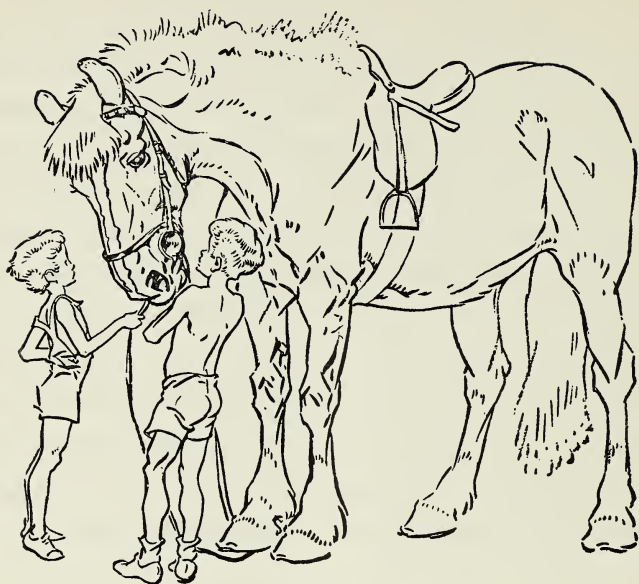
Lyb straightened up in her saddle. Secretary-Treasurer would be fun, and Honorary Whip sounded splendid. Better even than President or Master of Foxhounds. She looked at Sandy as he plodded steadily along on old Potato Pete. He looked in a

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fog, as though he were still thinking about those old faded records. Usually Lyb felt cross at Sandy's daydreaming, but now suddenly she felt sorry for him. Sandy had done a good job on the records, and yet Sig ignored him. Ever since that day Sandy hadn't wanted to ride Sunny Sig had gone out of his way to make fun of him. A feeling of pity and of loyalty came together in Lyb's heart. "Sandy ought to be the Honorary Looker-Upper," she said suddenly. "He was wonderful with those records."

For a minute Sandy's face glowed with his pleased happy smile. Then Sig spoke, and his rather loud voice was as sharp as the cut of a riding whip. "Let him be the Looker-Upper," he said. "I guess he'll make out better with books than with horses."

CHAPTER VI: RIDING CLUB



THE NEXT MORNING the sun poured into the bare east bedroom that looked out over the foothills of the Berkshires. Sig opened one eye and rolled over on the big bed out of the bright sunlight. Even before he was quite awake he began thinking about the island and the barn. Right from the first moment he'd known the island was exciting, but now, now

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when he realized the possibilities of the barn, the discovery of the island was the most important thing that had happened to him since he and Father had moved to Connecticut.

Sig opened his eyes, blinked at the white ceiling, and closed them again. He could just see that barn and the big buttonwood tree in his mind's eye. If things went wrong with Father, or with anyone else, the island would be a perfect hide-out. It was so protected by the woods and the swamps that Father had never seen it, and even Mr. and Mrs. Hardwicke hadn't known about it until Lyb told them. The place was just meant for a hideaway, and if they got the barn fixed up it would be a refuge for Mliss too. Sig stretched luxuriously. He felt safer about Mliss than he'd felt for weeks. Connecticut was good. It was even better than Maryland. There weren't the soft red roads for riding, but in spite of that it was more fun. There were all those unexpected woods and hills, for one thing, and then there were plenty of streams like the Black River. Above all, in Connecticut there was Buttonwood Island.

Sig began to doze again. He was almost asleep when Bingle, the setter, barked right underneath his window, and he jumped out of bed. He washed

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quickly and put on his faded blue shirt and his worn jodhpurs.

He hurried down to the big dark dining room, but one empty coffee cup and an eggy plate told him that as usual his father had gotten up early. He went into the kitchen where the big shining stove and the neat red chairs and table seemed to make it more hospitable and comfortable than any other room in the house. Hilda, the Swedish cook, was pulling a steaming pan of corn bread out of the lower oven.

Sig sniffed luxuriously. "Hello, Hilda," he said. "How about my having breakfast in here?"

Hilda regarded him with pale but not unfriendly eyes. "Vy not?" she said, and cleared a place for him at the kitchen table.

Sig helped himself to oatmeal from the saucepan on the stove, loaded the oatmeal with brown sugar, and looked around for milk. He found the milk pitcher but spilled the milk as he reached for it. "Gee, look what I've done," Sig said as the milk trickled in a white stream toward the spice boxes Hilda had neatly arranged on the bright table.

Instantly Hilda turned from the stove and saw the mess. With one efficient motion she wiped up the milk. Then she swept the boxes onto a tray, and set

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Sig's oatmeal down in front of him. "What for you make such a mess in mine kitchen?" she said. "What for you always causing such trouble? Trouble like pain in the back . . ."

Sig settled down undisturbed to his oatmeal. Hilda got mad but it didn't mean anything. She had been with the O'Haras ever since Sig's mother had died when he was a baby. For years she had waged constant war with a steadily leaving train of nurses, but now that Sig hadn't had a nurse for years she had settled down as undisputed boss of the O'Hara household. Even Father usually took Hilda's suggestions, Sig thought wonderingly. Even Father, who when he spoke to anyone else sounded as though he were still ordering out his old cavalry regiment, was tactful to Hilda.

Sig bolted his oatmeal and helped himself to corn bread. It was going to be a busy morning. First he had to feed Bingle's pups, clean Mliss, get his exercising done, and then collect the things he wanted to take to the island. Sig could hardly wait to get to the island. Now that Sandy was satisfied that no one would kick them off in a hurry, they could really get going on the riding club.

Sig hurried down to the stable, but the minute he

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got there it was plain his father had been there before him. The straw bedding was neatly edged at the back of the standing stalls. The brass door rings on the box stalls shone like gold, and Pat Ryan, the Irish groom, was rubbing down Tipperary as though his life hung on his seeing his face in the big hunter's mahogany sides.

"Where's Father?" Sig asked as he poured the milk and stale bread into Bingle's big pan.

"Exercising Barnegat," Pat said. "Taking him over the jumps in the big field."

"How'd Barnegat go? He was raising cane yesterday!"

Paddy grinned so that his gold teeth showed up like an ear of corn. "Sure, how would the big horse go with himself up?" he asked. "He went like a lamb. The quietest bit of a lamb you ever saw."

Sig shook his head and led Mliss out of her stall. His father could ride horses that no one else could handle. He could train dogs, too, or hit a quarter with a pistol when he threw the coin up in the air. Sig felt in his pocket for the sugar that Mliss was nosing for and patted her soft nose. Father could do pretty nearly anything, when you came down to it. Perhaps that was why he wasn't so awfully easy to

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live with. He did everything so well himself that it was hard for him to make allowances for other people.

"Which horses are you riding?" Sig asked as he fastened the tie ropes to Mliss's halter.

"Only Winsome," Pat said as he finished off the hunter's hoofs with a black tar preparation. "The major's exercising the others himself. He said you could take out Mliss but not to forget about the pups."

Sig glanced into the unused stall where Bingle's three coal-black puppies burrowed themselves in their mother's chestnut side. Major O'Hara hadn't had any use for those paddle-footed, flap-eared, thoroughly mongrel pups. They were all to be given away by the time they were six weeks old, and they had been six weeks old yesterday. Sig had found homes for two in the village, but the third, who was right now trying to crowd his brothers away from their breakfast, was still a problem. Sig's brows knotted in a frown, and then he thought of the Hardwickes and smiled. They didn't have any dog except Tip, the cocker, and he was pretty old. The Hardwickes would probably like to have the puppy if their family would let them keep it.

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Sig snapped Mliss between the two tie ropes on the cleaning floor and walked over to the little open brush cupboard near Pat. As he passed Winsome, whom Pat was grooming, he put out his hand to pat her, and she jumped as though she had been bitten. Sig moved more slowly and worked his hand slowly along her neck. "She's still awfully head shy," he said. "How long will it last, do you suppose?"

Pat shrugged his shoulders. "'Tis a hard thing to cure," he said, "but the major said she was just to be handled gently and she'd soon come round."

Sig began to curry Mliss with short practiced strokes. Horses who were head shy, or kickers, or trouble makers in some way were nothing new to Pat and himself. Down in the Greenspring Valley, where they had lived before, Major O'Hara had kept his stable full by taking horses other people wouldn't or couldn't ride. Up here in Connecticut he was doing exactly the same thing. He bought wild horses cheap, and then after a few months of expert handling, when they were ready to go safely for any rider, they were sold at a profit.

Once, as Sig groomed Mliss, he looked over at Winsome. Winsome was really a very good buy. She was a handsome bay with a pretty Arab head. She

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was head shy in the stable, but once you were on her back she was so gentle as to be almost dull. Sig sponged off Mliss's face and long ears as though she were a baby. He saw Pat disappear into the other half of the barn and threw his arms around her small neck. Mliss's legs were knobby and her head looked too large for her small dumpy body, but looks weren't everything. Pat came back into the stable, and Sig groomed frantically.

"Father didn't say anything about Mliss, did he?" he asked.

"No, and why should he?"

"Oh well, no reason at all," Sig said vaguely, and brushed out her chestnut tail that was so much lighter than the rest of her body. He put on the hoof tar and began to saddle and bridle her. He put the reins over her neck and took off her halter, and it almost seemed as though Mliss yawned so as to help take the bit.

Sig patted her and carefully fastened the curb and the chin strap. Mliss was perfection, and it was just that that worried him. Now that Mliss was thoroughly trained Major O'Hara was bored with her. He had bought her cheap, had shown Sig how to train her, and now, and now . . . The awful thought

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stuck in Sig's mind. Now that almost any kid could ride her he might put her up for sale at his usual profit.

Once Sig thought of talking about it to Pat. But as he looked at Pat's broad Irish face he changed his mind. Pat was nice and good natured, but he was so in awe of Major O'Hara that every word Sig said would go straight back to his father.

Sig shrugged his shoulders and led the little mare past the other stalls. Winsome, Tipperary, Bally Hooley, and the empty box belonging to Barnegat. They were all good horses. Better bred and better looking than Mliss, but none of them made him feel warm, and proud, and happy the way Mliss did. For the first time he had been able to get more out of a horse than Pat Ryan or even his father. And Mliss was more than just a horse who went well for him. She was his pet and his friend, who whinnied when he came near, and trotted toward him at the first whistle.

Sig walked past the white-fenced courtyard down to the woodshed behind the barn. He fastened Mliss to a fence and made a neat pile of secondhand shingles that had been stored for kindling. He made up a bundle with string, tied a hammer on the top

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of it, and then went down to the tumble-down garage that was such a contrast to the neat stable. He made himself up a packet of assorted nails and stowed them into his pocket. Then with his right hand he held the wood and with the left he swung himself up on Mliss's back. He was awkward with just the one free arm, and one of his boards slapped her side. "Whoa, Mliss," he said. "Whoa, girl." And the little mare stood perfectly still. "You're a peach," he praised her, "a regular knock-out." He touched her lightly with his heels, and she moved readily toward the island.

Sig eased the bundle onto his back and began to whistle. The barn and the island were the answers to his problem. Once they got the barn fixed up he would have a place to take Mliss to if Father no longer wanted her in the stable.

Lyb and Sandy were there ahead of him. Lyb stood near the shed gesturing with her arms as though she were rehearsing a part in a play. Sandy sat curled up in the sun on the stone ledge at the end of the island. He sat up and blinked when Sig and Mliss came through the woods followed by Bingle. Lyb gave a shout and rushed down to the water's edge to meet him.

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Sig held his package of boards with his right hand and guided Mliss carefully with his left. "Keep going, girl," he said, and urged her forward with his long supple legs. For one second at the edge of the river Sig thought the little mare might refuse. She pawed the ground with her small hoof as though to make sure the ford was of solid gravel and not of the treacherous river mud. The footing satisfied her, and in another moment she started across. Sig swung his legs up out of the stirrups and got over without even getting wet.

"Three cheers for you," Lyb said. "The first horse comes to the riding club."

Sig felt pleased until he looked at Sandy. Sandy hadn't moved from his place in the sun and sat staring at Sig with the queer, unseeing look that Sig found so irritating.

Sig slid to the ground with his shingles bumping his side. Still Sandy stared at him. "What are you looking at?" Sig demanded.

Sandy looked embarrassed. "Just thinking," he mumbled.

"Thinking what?"

"Well, just thinking that you looked the way the Jesuit missionaries must have looked when they rode

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through the forest. Those—those shingles would be tracts, you know.”

“Oh, bunk,” Sig said, and strode up to the shed with Mliss at his heels like a goat. “Don’t be so cock-simple.”

He dropped the shingles by the barn and began to look it over. “We’ll have an open fireplace near here,” Lyb said, “for hunt breakfasts. And we’ll have a place to hang ribbons and trophies inside.”

Sig grinned and began to plan where he would start work. Somehow Sandy’s daydreams irritated him, while Lyb’s were equally cockeyed and he didn’t mind. Probably, he thought, because it didn’t matter if a girl got dreamy but it made a boy seem like a dope. “I guess we’d better start with the roof,” Sig said, “because I brought shingles. What sort of wood did you bring?”

“I didn’t bring any. I brought some tie ropes, though, and two saddle racks that were up in the barn and weren’t being used. Joe took them down for me.”

Sig studied the racks. They were in good condition and in time they would be useful, but right now wood planks were more needed.

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"We need some long boards for patching," Sig said, and just then Sandy stood up.

"I'll get you whatever you need," he said. "If Joe will let me have it."

Sig explained what they needed and then started in to work. He tried to get Lyb hammering in some shingles on the low part of the roof, but she was hopelessly awkward and Sandy was worse. First they had trouble climbing up on the roof, and then as soon as they got there they both got splinters. Finally Sandy hammered himself on his own thumb. Sig shook his head in disgust. The Hardwickses were nice enough but they certainly weren't practical.

"I guess you'd better feed the shingles up to me," Sig said, and edged himself cautiously along the ridgepole. "There aren't very many holes."

He had just finished his first patch when he looked up and saw that Sandy had crossed the fallen log. "I'm going to get the extra wood," Sandy called. "Is there anything else you want?"

Sig shook his head and hit another nail especially hard. That was one of the irritating things about Sandy. You'd be cross to him because he was dumb, and then he'd go and do something especially nice, and obliging and make you feel like a cheap skate.

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Sig growled to himself, and then as Bingle flashed through the woods after a rabbit he remembered the puppy. It was only a mutt, of course, but it was awfully cute, and if Lyb's family would let her have it she'd probably like it. "We've got a puppy I thought you might like," he said as he reached for his next shingle. "One of Bingle's, you know. The other half's terrier."

Lyb's reactions were even better than Sig had hoped. She dropped the shingles with a loud, applauding clatter. "Oh, Sig," she said. "Sig O'Hara, you mean to say you're giving us a dog to keep?"

For the first time since he'd forded to the island Sig felt thoroughly pleased with himself. "Of course that's what I mean," he said. "D'you think your family'll let you? It isn't a thoroughbred, you know."

"Of course they'll let us keep it," Lyb said. "Why ever should they care if it's a thoroughbred or not?"

Sig finished off his last good shingle and slung himself off the roof. "I guess people feel differently," he said. "My old man doesn't keep anything unless he thinks it's got the makings of a champion. He wants everything to kind of keep up the standard of Donegal Farm."

Lyb tried to hit the last shingles in place with a

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stone. "Don't do that," Sig said, and finished it off with his hammer. "If you do that this whole place might cave in. It isn't any too strong anyhow." Sig let himself down carefully and picked out a few splinters from his clothes.

"Now let's put up the racks and some shelves," Lyb said, but Sig was firm.

"Outside first," he said. "We'll have to wait until Sandy comes back with the wood, but in the meantime we can putty up the windows."

Lyb had never puttied before, but when Sig produced a round grayish ball of putty from his pocket she was crazy to try. She flew at it as though it were peanut butter, and then in a few minutes she was bored and let Sig finish up the crumbling edges of the pane she had begun.

Sig was nearly through his second pane when he heard voices and the next moment looked up to see Sandy and the twins coming toward the island. Sandy was loaded down with wood, and even the twins looked like two small dwarfs carrying shingles through the woods.

"Sandy!" Lyb said, and her voice was furious. "You gave the secret away."

Sandy said nothing but tried to help the twins

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across the log. Spuggy rushed across first, sputtering with excitement. Halfway he dropped half his shingles, nearly fell after them, and finally plopped onto the shore. "Wow, what a place!" he said. "Wow!"

Spinney took things more slowly. She studied the tree, the bank, and the island, and then, taking off her shoes, she sat down and carefully inched her way across.

"Thith ith nice," she said, and then she saw Lyb's face. "It ithn't Sandy's fault," she said, and the lisp was stronger than ever. "We followed him to the woodpile wifout his knowing. We were Indians thtalking, until Spuggy fell down and made a noise."

Lyb turned on Sandy, and her dark face was red with disgust. "Of all the stupid boobs," she said, "I think you're the stupidest, dopiest, dumbest!"

Sig wiped off his knife on a leaf. He felt cross himself, and he wanted to give Sandy a piece of his mind. He opened his mouth to speak, and then when he saw Sandy's face he shut it again with a little hiss. Sandy's long pointed face was so white he looked almost sick.

"What's happened?" Sig asked, and Sandy turned big brown eyes on him that reminded him of Bingle.

"I can't ride," Sandy said. "Not for a whole

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month or more. Joe told me just now he needed Pete for the cultivating and then for the haying, and I won't be able to be in the riding club."

For the second time that day Sig felt an overpowering impulse to be generous. He thought of Winsome and wondered what his father would say about lending her to someone else. Almost before he knew what was happening he heard his own voice offer the horse. "Her name's Winsome," he told Sandy. "She's a nice quiet mare, and I'm sure my father wouldn't mind your using her."

"Oh, Sig," Sandy said, and his face changed color. "Could I really? And then I can be in the club right away."

"If there's going to be one, you mean," Lyb said, and pointed to where the twins were crawling out on the rock ledge. "With you giving away the secrets, the whole town'll be in on it in a few days."

"Ah, Lyb," Sandy pleaded. "They followed me down and I couldn't help it. Besides, couldn't they be extra braves or something?"

"*Braves!*" Lyb said, spitting the word with disgust. "Who ever heard of braves in a riding club?"

By this time Spinney had stopped exploring. She stood with her sandals in her hand, listening to the

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squabble. Now she turned and threw her arms around Sig's long legs. "Pleathe, Thig," she said, and her shy little face was very appealing. "Pleathe let me be in it."

Sig looked down at Spinney's small pathetic face. "Oh, sure," he said, and pulled himself free. "You and Spuggy can be the hunt servants."

"We'll see you tomorrow, then," Sandy said. "And maybe I could kind of watch you ride Winsome before I do."

Sig looked at Sandy as he stood under the button-wood tree. When Sandy even spoke about riding Winsome he was so excited and nervous that his face turned pale. Sig turned on his heel so that he couldn't look at him. Sandy was nice, he was really very nice, but Sig wondered what his father would have said about him if he'd ever been scared of a horse three times as wild as Winsome.

CHAPTER VII: LUCKY DAY



THE NEXT MORNING at the island was the first one that Sig hadn't enjoyed. The twins buzzed around like a couple of hornets. Spuggy upset the nails and then, as he scrambled to pick them up, mixed up all the boards that Sig had carefully arranged the way he was going to use them. As usual Spinney wandered

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off on a little exploring trip of her own. For a long time Sig tried to answer Spuggy's questions. "Why do you nail it that way? Where are you going to hunt? Will you hunt with guns? Will the horses sleep here?"

The stream of questions was unending, and Sig stopped answering and worked without speaking. Once when Spuggy knocked against a board he was sawing he looked across at Lyb, but she only sniffed. Her face said, "I told you so," as though she had spoken, and her irritated shoulders were even more expressive. "You asked them," the shoulders said. "You and Sandy. I'm not responsible."

For a few minutes Spuggy was busy picking flowers, and the silence was so great that Sig felt sure he could hear the birds all the way back to his father's stable. "Where's Spinney?" Sandy said suddenly, and just then they saw her.

She was fishing from the flat rock at the tip end of the island. Her rod was a long stick, and one of her sandals was the fish. She poked at it now, and it bobbed under the water and came up beyond her reach.

"Spinney!" Lyb said, and in four long strides she was beside her. "What are you doing?"

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"Fithing," Spinney said, and never even looked around. Lyb grabbed for the stick and tried to get the sandal, but it only bobbed under again and came out still further away. She rolled up her shorts and took off her sneakers. Then she plunged up to her hips in the slimy water and rescued the shoe. She came back dripping and furious. "Where's the other one?" she said.

"It'th no uth," Spinney said. "The other thailed way, way away."

Spinney giggled but Lyb was really annoyed, and for the first time Sig felt a little tired of the Hardwicke twins. Spuggy was a clumsy little chatterbox, but Spinney, who looked so quiet and good, was the real mischief. Suddenly Sandy had an inspiration. "Suppose you two go find pine cones," he said. "You ought to be able to find plenty near the house, and you could bring 'em down here for picnic fires."

"I don't want to," Spuggy said, and tried to balance on the board Sig was sawing. "I want to help Sig."

"If we get the pine coneth can we go on the picnics?" Spinney asked.

"Of course," Sandy said, and a few minutes later they wandered off.

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But even when Lyb and Sandy stopped quarreling about the twins Sig couldn't concentrate on his work. The promise he had made to Sandy about Winsome plagued him like an aching tooth. He wondered how he could ever have been fool enough to offer Sandy a horse without first asking Father's permission.

Sandy was patiently taking out nails from an old board, but once he stopped, and even before he opened his mouth Sig knew that he was going to talk about Winsome. "It was awfully nice of you to think about lending me that horse," he said.

Sig said nothing, and Sandy smiled the shy, slow smile that changed his thin face. "I told Mother about it, and she said you were a peach. She said she was going to call on your father and thank him for all of us."

Sig bit on a nail so hard that his jaw hurt.

"Could we get the puppy today?" Lyb put in. "We've got a place all ready for him in the barn, and maybe we could find out about the horse at the same time."

"My—my father wouldn't be there now," Sig said, and wondered if the Hardwickses would guess that he hadn't dared ask his father about lending

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Winsome. "He—that is, he usually schools the horses all morning."

"Oh, we could wait until noon," Sandy said. "We could stop over on the way home."

Sig hit his board such a blow that it cracked and he had to find a new one. Sandy wasn't trying to be mean. He was too dumb and too simple. It was just that he never promised anything he couldn't do and he couldn't imagine anybody else making such a promise. Sig caught Lyb's eye, but it was half teasing and half scornful. She thinks I'm going to crawl, Sig thought miserably. She thinks I'm going to back down now. "We'll see about it later," he said out loud. "My father'll be home for lunch."

Promptly at noon Lyb suggested that they be off, and there was nothing for Sig to do but saddle Mliss up and lead the way.

"We can keep up with you easily," Sandy said. "Mliss takes such nice little steps through the woods."

Sig forded the river without speaking and wished for the hundredth time that he had asked his father about Winsome before he had mentioned it to the Hardwickses. All the way through the O'Haras' land Sandy chattered about how the Indians must have gone through these woods, but Sig didn't listen. He

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was too busy rehearsing in his own mind how he was going to ask his father about the horse.

"This afternoon we'll bring down some clippers and a rake," Lyb said when they reached the O'Haras' open meadows. "We'll get the island all trimmed up in no time."

It seemed to Sig that it had never taken him less time to get home from the island. He looked ahead of him and hoped that perhaps his father would be still schooling, or off to Millerton, or on one of his rare trips to the city. But luck was against him. As they came into the stable yard Sig could see his father, looking very straight and tall in his perfect riding clothes, standing right by the stable door.

As they walked into the yard Major O'Hara turned, and it seemed to Sig that the very gravel wilted under his father's polished boots. "Hello, Sig," his father said. "What have you been up to?"

Sig slid awkwardly off his horse. "This is Elizabeth Hardwicke," he said, "and Sandy. They've come for Bingle's puppy."

Major O'Hara came forward and shook hands, and Sig felt as though he were looking at his father through the Hardwicks' eyes. Major O'Hara was tall and dark, and he still looked like a soldier. He

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took off his hat to Lyb, and Sig wondered if he could ever learn to do even such a small act quite so smoothly. He felt hopelessly clumsy and inadequate, as he always did in front of his father, but Lyb seemed more at ease than ever.

"You certainly have done a lot to this place," she said, and pointed to the newly painted house and the reconditioned barn. "It's ever so much nicer than when the Petchulaks had it."

"It certainly is," Sandy said, and Sig stared at him as he twisted and untwisted Mliss's reins through awkward fingers.

"I hear you're the boy that's interested in Indian finds," Major O'Hara said, and Sandy looked pleased. "Your family called here the other day and they told me all about it. I came across some interesting things while I was out in New Mexico. And I was out in Old Mexico, too, when they discovered one of the big Mayan ruins."

"Were you really, sir?" Sandy said. "I'd rather see Chichen Itzá than any place I've ever heard of."

Sig no longer followed the conversation. Somehow, sometime, he would have to break into that conversation. Somehow he had to ask about Winsome, and Father might be cross at the mere idea

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of someone else riding one of his horses. Sig shivered. He might be more than cross. He might be really furious and make a scene the way he had on the terrible day when Sig had lamed Barnegat in the Monmouth County horse show.

Sig moved a few steps nearer, and the hammer he had brought home with him clattered to the ground. For the first time Major O'Hara looked at his son, and his expression was less cordial. "Why ride with a hammer?" he said.

Before Sig could fumble out an answer Lyb had picked up the hammer, and now the major was laughing at some flip remark she had made about Sig's using the hammer to get the flies on Mliss. "Well, you'd better get her into the stable," Major O'Hara said. "Silly to keep her out in the wind after your ride. While you put her away we'll get the pup."

By the time Sig had Mliss tied up Lyb had the puppy in her arms. "It's a beauty," she said. "Ever so much nicer than you said. Mother'll be crazy about it."

Sig patted the puppy's round black head, and it licked his hand with its small pink tongue. For a moment, as he stroked its sleek, mousy sides, Sig

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was sorry that it was going away. But he was sorry only for an instant. He had Bingle and he still had Mliss, and if only Father wouldn't get mad nothing else mattered.

Sig started sponging Mliss off, and his father led the others into the house. When Sig got there they were all sitting in the stiff living room that somehow was never as warm or as cheerful as Hilda's kitchen. But the Hardwickes didn't seem to mind. Sandy and the major were talking about Indians, and Lyb was stroking the puppy that had curled up on her lap. As Sig came into the room she looked across at him. "We've had a grand time riding with Sig, Major O'Hara," she said, and it was clear that she meant it. "He helped me a lot about our new horse. I don't think I could have managed him without Sig's showing me how."

Major O'Hara looked pleased. "Sig's a pretty good horseman," he said, and Sig felt his face and his cheeks and even his throat getting red. Praise—and from his father. It was a blissful and unbelievable sensation, and now he had to spoil it all by asking about Winsome.

Sig dug his hands deep into his pockets. The phrases he had so carefully rehearsed left him en-

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tirely, and he plunged into words as awkwardly as a pig into corn. "C-could we have Winsome?" he began. "I mean, that is, would it be all right if Sandy rode Winsome instead of me?"

The little lines on Major O'Hara's forehead deepened. "Winsome? Sandy ride Winsome? What do you mean?"

Once more Sig struggled for the right words, and once more Lyb sailed in like an actress who loves her role. "It's an awfully fresh thing for us to ask," she said. "But Sig said you weren't planning to hunt Winsome this fall, and the horse Sandy's been riding has to be used on the farm, and we wondered——"

"If it would be all right for Sandy to ride Winsome," Sig finished in a rush of words. "I—I could spend more time on the other horses."

"Why, of course," Major O'Hara said. "Why didn't you think of it sooner, Sig? It's a grand plan." He turned to Lyb. "I've got more trouble than it's worth to get Sig to ride anything but that little chestnut mare."

For the second time that day Sig couldn't believe his own ears. He moved a little nearer his father, and the small table he had been standing beside crashed to the floor. "That's clever," Major O'Hara said.

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"Can't you learn not to knock over everything?"

Major O'Hara was annoyed, but now Sig no longer worried. He was used to having his father scold about his clumsiness. What did that matter now? He'd said yes about Winsome. And, more than that, he was really liking the Hardwickses, and he usually detested Sig's friends. Sig saw his father's look of approval as Sandy picked up the table and Lyb put back the ash trays. A moment later he got out some pictures of Winsome taken at the Devon horse show. "Here's the mare," he said to Sandy. "You'll find she's a nice quiet ride."

"Could we take her tomorrow?" Sig asked, and his father nodded.

"Of course. Take her any time. Glad to have her used."

A few minutes later Lyb and Sandy had to leave, but before they went they both thanked Major O'Hara and shook hands. "We'll take good care of the pup," Sandy told Sig as they went out the front door. "And we'll bring him down to the island whenever you're there."

Sig grinned, and now he was gladder than ever that he'd brought the Hardwickses home. "Oh, that's all right," he said, and he touched the puppy

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lightly, as though he hadn't ever really cared about it at all. "I thought you'd like something younger than old Tip."

For the rest of the day Sig walked on air. At lunch Father couldn't say enough about the Hardwickses, and Sig was ready to join in. Even if Lyb sometimes put on an act and Sandy was sort of a sissy, Sig liked them better than any people he'd ever known. Once or twice Major O'Hara wondered out loud why Sig couldn't act as politely as Lyb or Sandy, but Sig didn't mind. Father had let them take Winsome. More than that, he had said—yes, had actually said out loud and in front of people—that Sig was a good horseman.

Sig went back early to the island. A few minutes later Sandy and Lyb came through the woods with the puppy, in a brand-new collar, trailing behind them. "My, your father's a peach," Lyb said when they had admired the puppy. "He was swell to lend us the horse."

"And he knows such a lot," Sandy said. "More about the Mayans than anyone I've ever met."

Sig turned to fasten a screw in the barn door. He was proud. So very proud he was afraid he might do something silly. "Did you bring the clippers?" he

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said abruptly, and hoped that neither Lyb nor Sandy would guess at his pleasure and relief. "Did you bring the rake?"

"We brought everything," Lyb said. "And the twins are coming when they've had their rest. They've named the puppy Little Black Sambo, and they want to have a real christening for it the way the Andrews did for their baby."

The afternoon flew, and for the first time they could see real changes in the island. The barn still looked patchy but it was practically water-tight, and the windows looked marvelous where Sig had painted over the new putty. "I like this place even better now that it's used looking," Lyb said. "We've made a regular path up from the water."

"And I like the inside of the barn," Sig said, nodding at the neat row of bridle hooks and three saddle racks.

They set to work trying to partition the rest of the barn into separate stalls. It was hard work, and Sig had trouble managing to make sides out of the secondhand wood that was all they had been able to collect. He was just bending over an old board that seemed especially full of rusty nails when he heard the puppy give a series of short, high yaps. The

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next minute Lyb dropped her saw. Sandy turned, and there at the door of the barn stood a man!

"How—how did you get here?" Lyb asked.

"Over the log," the man said. "Same way as you did, I guess."

Sig put down his wood and moved toward the man. He was of middling height, dressed in a dark suit. His clothes and shoes looked new and citified for someone who was off on a tramp through the woods. "How did you happen to come here?" Sandy said, and Sig knew that all three of them were thinking the same thing. Did this man own the property? Or, even more possible, was he working for someone who owned it? And would he put them off?

The man's next words put them at ease. "My name's Akeley," he said. "I'm just down at Millerton on a paint job, so I thought I'd like to stroll through these woods. Used to live near here when I was a boy."

"Was there an island here then?" Sandy asked.

The man looked at him curiously. "Don't think so," he said. "No, come to think of it, this bit of land was called Peckham's Point. But of course nobody ever came here in those days."

"Why ever not," Lyb asked; "when it's so pretty?"

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The man shrugged narrow shoulders. "Pretty, yes," he said. "But no good for farming. And then, of course, there were all the stories."

"Stories?" Sandy moved toward the man as though pulled by a magnet. "What stories?"

The man leaned up against the big buttonwood tree and looked around at the three children. "Mean to say you've never heard 'em? They used to say this place was haunted."

"Haunted?" Lyb's voice was high with excitement. "You mean to say this island's haunted?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," the man said. "But they do say there were bloody doings here in the Indian days, and nobody's been able to stay here since. Have you ever come on any Indian stuff down here?"

Sig and Sandy shook their heads while Lyb went right on asking questions. "How was it haunted?" she said. "Who haunted it?"

"Why, I hear there was an Indian called Black Dog—no, Black Feather, I guess it was—that seemed to claim possession to this place. Said that anyone who took as much as a leaf from this tree had to deal with him. They said that when the Peckhams tried to sell the wood from here he came after them with a red vixen at his heels like a dog."

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"But that's silly," Lyb said. "There aren't such things as ghosts."

"I never set much stock by them tales," the man said, looking around him as he spoke. "If you never found nothing, there probably wasn't any Indians here at all."

"Tell us more," Sandy said. "Were they Podunk Indians? Did they have an encampment here?"

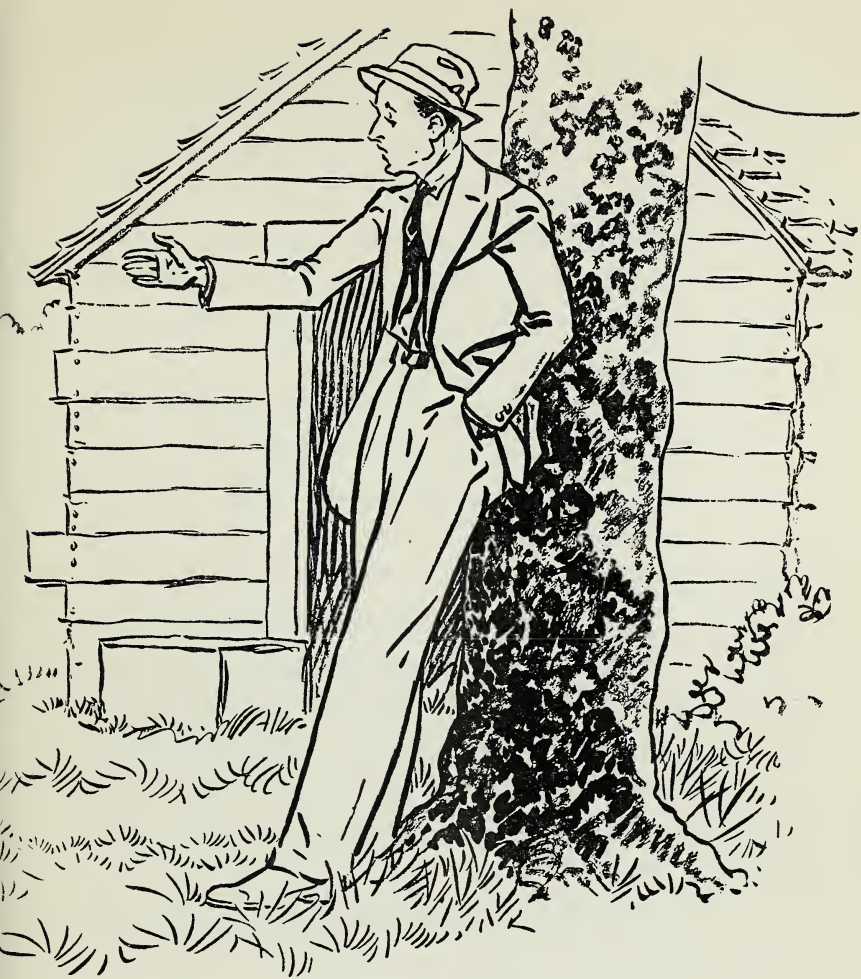
The man straightened up. "Couldn't say, I'm sure," he answered. "More'n likely the whole thing's made up."

Sandy would have asked a hundred more questions, but now the man was leaving the island. "Well, I'm glad to have seen the place again," he said. "I work over to Litchfield mostly now and I don't get down here much."

"But did anybody ever find any fireplaces around here?" Sandy asked. "Were the Indians Algonquin?"

The man walked carefully across the log. "Never heard tell," he said. "Never heard tell. Only thing I ever heard were kind of old wives' tales about Black Feather leaving some sort of poison arrows. Probably it was all made up anyhow." By this time he was over the fallen log, and even before Sandy





The man leaned up against the big buttonwood tree. "Mean to say you've never heard 'em? They used to say this place was haunted."

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could ask another question he had disappeared in the woods in the direction of the O'Hara place.

"Well!" said Lyb. "Did you ever hear anything more exciting! Haunted! I wonder who he was?"

"Pat Ryan'll know," Sig said. "He couldn't go off our place without going by the stable, and Pat always shoots the bull with everyone who goes through. Pat's sure to find out."

They set to work again inside the barn, but they needed more wood to finish off the stalls, so they began to do some clearing outside. "We ought to have a hitching post here," Sig said. "How about digging one?"

As usual Sandy was ready and willing to help. "Sure, I'll dig the hole for it," he said. "That log over there'd be right." They both began digging, and then suddenly Sandy gave a little cry and dropped to his knees. The next instant Sig saw him cleaning an old stone with his shirt as though it were a diamond.

"What is it?" Lyb called, and Sig charged back toward Sandy.

"What is it? D'you find an arrowhead?"

"Better than that. A million times better. It's a real gorget. Decoration, you know, they wore around

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their necks." Lyb and Sig crowded around Sandy, and as he cleaned off the stone they both studied it. It was quite smooth and flat, and at either end was a small round hole. "It was probably worn by a brave," Sandy said, and handled the gray stone as though it were a holy relic. "Maybe they ran deer thongs or something like that through the holes," he said. "I'd like to know if it was ever painted."

Sig ran the smooth, hard stone through his fingers and then handed it back to Sandy. "You're in luck," he said. "I've never found anything like that in my life."

Sandy was just going to put it in his pocket when Lyb turned to him with one of her elaborate made-up gestures. "How about the curse of Black Feather?" she asked. "If you take that stone from the island you'll be haunted by an Indian and his wild red vixen!"

Lyb's finger pointed, and her eyes flashed as they did when she was acting. For a minute Sig felt just the least suggestion of a shiver go through him. It was queer, having that man suddenly turn up and then tell them that story. He turned to see how Sandy felt about it, but Sandy was quite unconcerned. "I'll take a chance on Black Feather," he

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said calmly. "I've got a lot of questions I'd like to ask a Podunk Indian anyway. Maybe he'd know where I could find two more ax heads like that swell pair I lost."

Sig started to laugh, but the next instant the sound froze in his throat. He had heard a sudden movement in the woods across the river! He looked up and caught a glimpse of something dark blue. The next moment there was only the green, concealing flutter of the poplar leaves. "Look!" he said, but Lyb and Sandy were already staring across the island.

"That man!" Lyb whispered, and Sandy's face was white.

"He was watching us!" he whispered. "He saw me find the gorget!"

A moment later they dashed through the woods, but there was no sound except the startled cawing of some crows. When they came out at the O'Haras' Pat was reading the paper by the stable door.

"Did you see him?" Sig panted. "A man in dark blue."

"Did someone come through here? Just a minute ago."

Pat put down his paper and looked at them with his mouth open. "What are you latherin' about?"

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he asked. "Sure, and there hasn't been the sign of a man the whole day."

And they couldn't find out anything further about the man. He had disappeared as suddenly as he had come. "Probably just some hobo who walked up the railroad and then went into the woods to get cool," Paddy suggested. "Sure, if he didn't come through here he must have gone by your place or out through the woods."

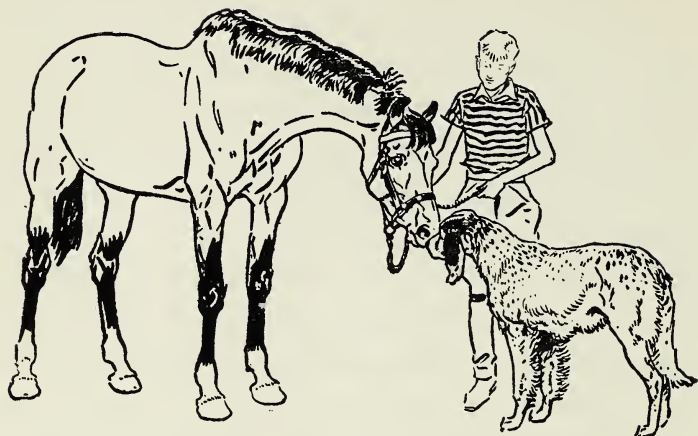
Sig went home with the Hardwicks and stayed for supper as he often did. They told Mr. Hardwicke about the man, but his explanation was the same as Pat's. "Probably just a tramp," he said. "There used to be a lot of them around here when I was a boy."

"He didn't look like a tramp," Lyb insisted. "He looked queer and pale and kind of mysterious."

Mr. Hardwicke laughed, and Lyb shut up like a clam. "Maybe he was a tramp," Sandy said when they were playing croquet after supper. "But I wonder how he got to know so much about this part of the country."

Sig shrugged his shoulders. "If he's really doing a paint job around here we might see him again," he said. "But maybe he was just kidding, the way he was about that old Indian with the tame fox."

CHAPTER VIII: HORSE WITH THE WILD EYE



THAT NIGHT the weather broke and turned cool. Sandy woke up from deep, delicious sleep and reached for the blankets. For the first time in weeks they felt comfortable, and he pulled them cozily around his neck. He stretched slowly, and then he remembered something was hanging over him. It was the new horse! The mare, Winsome, that belonged to Sig, and today he was going to ride her. Sandy moved uneasily, and the spell of the long fresh night was broken.

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He'd asked Sig to let him see the horse being ridden, but Sig had just laughed, and he'd been too ashamed to ask again. Suddenly a big, frightening picture of a wild, uncontrolled Winsome grew in his mind like a creature in a nightmare. Sandy hurried out of bed and into his clothes, but even while he was dressing he kept thinking about what was ahead of him.

After breakfast when Sandy and Lyb went out of doors the dew was still heavy on the thick grass, and in a few minutes their feet were drenched and cold. "It'll be swell having that extra horse," Lyb said. "We can learn to do all sorts of stunts three abreast."

Sandy said nothing and wished that he had worn a heavier sweater. He wasn't so sure it was going to be such fun. It seemed to him that it depended a good deal on the horse. He had seen it in the stall yesterday when they went over to the O'Haras', but he hadn't ridden it. Sandy plunged his cold hands into his blue jeans pockets and felt for the gorget. It was icy to his touch. Sandy screwed up his toes inside his wet shoes and felt colder than ever. He wished that he had started riding the new horse on a day that was less likely to make it feel fresh and skittish.

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By the time they reached the O'Haras' stable the major was already out and Sig was grooming Winsome. "She's all ready for you," he said. "I'm just giving her the final rubdown." He took up a stable cloth and began smoothing down her already gleaming sides.

"She's a beauty," Lyb said. "Even prettier than Sunny."

Sandy walked around the mare and inspected her carefully. Her coat was a rich bay and shone like old cherry wood. Her tail was black and free, and her small graceful head had an Arab look to it. Sandy reached out to pat her velvet nose, and all of a sudden there was trouble!

The mare drew back. Her hoofs thundered on the stable floor. Her big teeth bared and her ears went back. She would have reared if it hadn't been for the tie ropes that held her.

"Easy, pet, easy," Sig said, and kept on rubbing her soft neck.

Both Sandy and Lyb were startled. "Wh-what happened?" Sandy stammered. "Wh-what did I do?"

Sig grinned, and his smile was cocky. "She's a little head shy, that's all," he said, and finished off

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the mare's grooming with some tar hoof dressing.

"We had an awful time bridling her when we first bought her, but it's really easy now."

"But what makes her act that way?" Lyb asked, and Sandy moved to a respectful distance.

"Abuse," Sig said, and his face hardened. "Some dope of a dealer probably used to hit her."

Sandy stood outside the barn and stared at the mare. She seemed quiet now except for her wild, rolling eyes and her distended nostrils. "Ready to ride?" Sig asked, and Sandy nodded dumbly. He felt colder than ever and a little sick.

He moved forward a few feet and raised his hand awkwardly to pat the mare, and once more she jerked back her head. "She looks wild," Sandy said. "T-terribly."

Sig stroked the mare calm again. "It's just her being head shy makes her look wild," he said. "I've never seen her do a mean trick when someone was riding her."

Lyb managed to pat the mare without startling her, and now she turned to encourage Sandy. "She's quiet as a lamb, really," she said. "I've seen Sig ride her lots of times."

Sandy was too scared to pay any attention to Lyb.

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His eyes were only on the mare. "I couldn't ride her," he said. "I know I couldn't."

"But she's perfectly gentle," Sig protested. "Look, even Bingle knows it." He whistled to the dog. "Come kiss Winsome," he said. "That's a good girl."

Bingle came forward, her tail wagging close to her body and every inch of her wriggling with self-conscious pleasure. "Come on, now," Sig urged, and patted Winsome's nose. "Give Winsome a kiss."

Sandy held his breath. At each moment he expected to see the mare strike out with swift front feet. He held his breath, but Winsome only put down her head and Bingle licked her nose.

"See that?" Sig asked triumphantly. "It's only when she's scared she's any trouble."

Sandy curled up his toes in his wet shoes and shook his head. "I guess I'll wait," he said. "Maybe some day when it's warmer and she's feeling quieter."

For a moment Sig did nothing but stare at Sandy. Then he put on Winsome's bridle and fastened the saddle girth. Finally he turned back to Sandy. "It's your last chance," he said. "Either you ride her now or you don't have a horse for the riding club. I won't ask Father all over again."

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"I'd ride her." Lyb turned to Sandy. "But you wouldn't want to ride Sunny, you know."

"You could ride this horse in a halter," Sig urged. "Anyone could."

Sandy made one more hopeless gesture, but as the mare rolled her eyes he drew back. "I c-can't ride that horse," he said. "I'll—I'll just ride old Pete when Joe isn't using him."

Sig unsnapped the halter shanks without another word. He led the mare out of the stable and then swung lightly onto her back. "I'll see you down at the island," he called to Lyb. "I'll be down there with Mliss as soon as I get this one exercised."

"Sandy Hardwicke, I'm disgusted with you!" Lyb began. "Of all the sissies I ever knew you're the worst. Why, Spuggy or Spinney even would have more nerve."

Sandy watched Sig move off on the bay mare and said nothing. Once Sig was on a horse it looked as though nothing could move him. His grip and his balance were both perfect, but this time he didn't seem to need either. Winsome moved along as quietly as an old Shetland pony.

"See that?" Lyb said triumphantly. "See that? She's as quiet as Pete. You ought to know that Sig

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wouldn't lie to you about a horse. If he says a horse is quiet, it's quiet enough even for a big baby like you."

Sandy had nothing to say. Before he had felt sick with fright, but now he felt sick with self-disgust. Sig had given him his chance and he had lost it. Sandy thought about the time he hadn't ridden Sunny and the day they had looked up the records. Sig had been disgusted with him then, and he would be more disgusted with him now. He thought he was just a cowardly bookworm who was only useful for looking up things.

Lyb marched out of the stable with her dark head held high in the air. Sandy stumbled over a stable broom as he followed after. Lyb would have ridden the horse. Lyb would do anything if she were only dared enough. She would have mastered it the way she had mastered Sunny. Sandy moved hopelessly after Lyb toward the island. On his way down the O'Haras' drive he could see Sig riding Winsome around and around one of the big open pastures. The mare went as smoothly, as perfectly, as a piece of clockwork. Once a quail swooped out from some near-by bushes, but Winsome never even moved. Sandy stood and watched them for a moment and

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then walked quickly away, as though to walk off his own misery. A baby could have ridden that mare, a doll even.

The day dragged on as even black days will. When Sig joined them on the island he spoke entirely to Lyb, and both of them avoided Sandy. Once he went and lay down under the big buttonwood tree, but for the first time he was not happy there. The leaves rustled together in the light wind, and they sounded like so many whispering voices. "You're a coward," they said. "A coward. A miserable, miserable coward."

At lunch time Sandy let Lyb go up to the house ahead of him so as to avoid the long walk home together. When he got there she was sitting on the front porch talking to the twins. As he went up the front steps Spuggy clattered over to him. "Why aren't you riding Sig's horse?" he said. "Why aren't you?"

"Because I don't want to," Sandy said.

He headed for the door, but Spinney stood right ahead of him. She looked up at him without saying anything, and Sandy wondered miserably what she thought of a big brother that didn't dare ride another boy's horse.

Lyb settled down with a book. She had a pained

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expression on her face, and Sandy did his best to avoid her. He wandered through the big empty house, but Mother had gone out for lunch, and it echoed hollowly as it had in the dreadful days when Mother had first gotten sick and had gone out West to get well.

Sandy went into the kitchen to look for Maggie, but she was in the garden picking vegetables, and even that resource failed him. He went and sat down on the high kitchen stoop overlooking the neat clothes yard. He felt something warm and soft touch his hand and looked down at Little Black Sambo. The puppy tried to chew his sleeve and then pranced away on big clumsy feet. Sandy put out his hand; the puppy cocked its short ears and pranced back again, all ready to play. Sandy began to rub its back. Instantly the little dog relaxed and crouched gratefully near to Sandy with its small round head on his knee.

Sandy rubbed and rubbed without thinking of what he was doing. He thought of the summer. The beautiful golden summer, free of governesses and free of summer work. And now he had spoiled it. He thought of the island and the riding club and knew that he had no more share in it than the twins.

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He stopped stroking the puppy, and it began good-naturedly to lick his hand. Sandy pulled the dog up on his lap, and then suddenly he cried as he hadn't cried since he was Spuggy's age.

The rest of the week passed, and another week rolled slowly away. Sandy felt as though everyone and everything had changed except Mother, who was still the same. He spent more and more time with his Indian books, but even the books seemed dull after finding the gorget. The day after he had found it he had searched thoroughly around the post hole but made no further finds. When he began to try and trench back from the hole Sig and Lyb made it plain that he was in the way, and after that he gave it up.

He tried to join in the activities of the riding club as though he had never been going to ride Winsome, but it was no use. Sig and Lyb went off riding every day and talked about what they had seen or done on horseback. Major O'Hara began to give Lyb jumping lessons, and Sandy felt more left out of it than ever.

He tried hard to get back his old standing, but nothing worked. One time when they were cleaning out the barn he suggested that he ride Mliss across

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the ford and tether her in the opposite woods, but Sig brushed him away and rode the mare himself. He tried doing woodwork, but he was a hopeless carpenter. He didn't even have ideas like Lyb, who had suggested that they build bunks for themselves in one corner of the barn; and had wheedled a perfectly good cupboard from Joe, which they used to hold their brushes and a currycomb. It seemed to Sandy that he was of less use even than the twins. He was good at planning small jobs for them, and they trotted around the island as busy and as happy as squirrels gathering nuts. "I might as well be the twins' age," he thought miserably, "and collect pine cones and run errands."

He picked up the saw with a sudden burst of ambition. "I'll show 'em," he thought. "I'll show I can do things as much as they can."

He set to work on a nail-studded board, and in a moment his saw shrieked furiously as he hit a nail. "Take the nails out first," Sig said, and reached for the saw as though Sandy were Spuggy. For a moment Sandy was furious. He squared off from Sig and tried to hit him, but fighting was not in his line. Sig warded off his blows good-naturedly with his long arm and then, with one quick motion of his

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foot, tripped Sandy up so that he lay ignominiously at Sig's feet.

After that Sandy tried to stay away from the island, but it was no use. The place drew him as a compass needle is drawn to the north. He took to going there in the evening when Sig and Lyb had gone home. It was some comfort that Lyb wouldn't stay by herself in the misty twilight and that Sig steered away from the subject of Black Feather as though he really believed in ghosts. Sandy stretched out on the flat rock and looked down at the reflection of the buttonwood tree. The dark water was perfectly still. For a few minutes, as Sandy listened to the evening chirrup of the birds and the insistent clatter of the insects, he forgot about Lyb and Sig.

When Sandy was alone the island was his again. He ran his fingers through the cool, bending grass and once more peopled the place with the dim, reassuring shadows of the people who had loved it years before the first white settler was born.

He lay very still, thinking that some Pocassett boy might have rested in this very spot. They knew how to love the woods and streams—those Indians. They didn't bother about stone walls and fences to make land theirs. It was enough to use some spot that was

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sheltered from the north wind and where the water was plentiful.

Sandy lay for a long time with his head pillowed on his arms. He could hear the soft stir of the leaves and the gentle purring of the water. It was easy to think himself back hundreds of years in this quiet, hidden place. There were no sounds of cars here, nor people's voices, nor even the familiar noises of the farm. The whispers and echoes here were the same as they had always been. Sandy stirred so that he could look down the length of the island. In the half light the barn faded out of sight and the island seemed untouched. Sandy smiled to himself. The island was as good as it had been in the beginning. It was his magic carpet where, above all other places, he could think himself back into the past.

One evening Sandy started out with Sambo at his heels. After the first few days the twins had tired of the puppy, and Lyb never stuck to any one pet for very long. Sandy fed the little dog religiously, and at night it curled up on the foot of his bed. Now as he walked along the driveway it pattered along behind him, and as he slowed up it bumped into his heels, and he stooped down to pat it.

He decided to go a roundabout route to the island

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and went along the dirt country road that led to a little bridge over the Black River. Mr. Hardwicke had just brought him a book on excavations in Mexico, and he thought about the Mayan ruins as he moved along. He was so absorbed in his own thinking that he was almost on the bridge before he was aware that someone was there before him.

As they walked up the little rise that led to the bridge Sambo gave his yapping, babyish bark and the fur around his neck arched up in a crest. Sandy looked up and saw an elderly man leaning over the rail staring at the river. He looked up, and as he saw Sandy and his dog he smiled, and his face was lined and pleasant. "Hello," he said. "This is a nice evening, isn't it?"

Sandy walked over beside him, and the man stooped down and patted the puppy. "I like your dog," he said. "He certainly goes to heel nicely for such a little shaver."

They began to talk about Sambo, and Sandy showed him how he had already learned to shake hands. A few minutes later he leaned over the rail beside the man and looked down at the water. The river was at its midsummer low, and the banks were covered with jewelweed and wild cucumber. Sandy

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looked at his own reflection and then further downstream, where a clump of silver birches made a sharp white line against the gun-metal surface of the water.

"It's pretty, isn't it?" the man said. "No wonder the Indians called it the River of Peace."

"Did they?" Sandy said, and looked at the man with new interest. He was a tall man, stooped and weather-beaten, and with an unusually pleasant voice.

"They had good names for most things," the man said. "They called the mountains the Doors of Darkness because the sun set behind them, and they called the Black River the Path to the Good Lands."

They talked on and on, and for the first time in days Sandy really enjoyed himself. The man's name was Clark. He taught history in the winter, and this summer he was boarding in the village with old George Heinrich, the town clerk. Usually in the summer he had gone out West on archæological expeditions.

"You mean you went on the digs yourself?" Sandy asked. Hearing Major O'Hara's casual stories about the Mayan ruins had been interesting, but this promised to be a thousand times better. "You mean you were part of the expeditions?"

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The man nodded, and as he looked down at Sandy his face was encouraging. "I see you've got the bug yourself," he said. "How did you get interested in people who lived a thousand years ago?"

"They—they seem real, that's all," Sandy began. "Real and kind of easy to understand."

"Easier than most of the things that happen now," Mr. Clark finished. "Each stone, each chip, tells you something more about the way they lived."

"Have you made any finds around here?" Sandy asked eagerly, but Mr. Clark shook his head and his expression changed.

"No," he said shortly, and Sandy felt uncomfortable without knowing why.

"I see your dog's part setter," Mr. Clark said, changing the subject. "What else is he?"

"Terrier," Sandy said, but from then on the conversation lagged. It was growing dark, and they walked back up the road without speaking.

When they reached the big stone posts by the Hardwicks' drive Sandy stopped. "Good-by," he said. "It was nice to see you."

Mr. Clark nodded. "Good-by," he said, and then walked on quickly toward the village.

Sandy hurried up the drive with Sambo bobbing

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along at his heels. He said good night to the family and then went up to his room. As he got undressed he looked over at his Indian collection. It still seemed small and incomplete, with the terrible gap made by the loss of those two good ax heads on the day they had built the fire. For a moment Sandy wished he had spoken to Mr. Clark about them, but perhaps it was just as well not. Mr. Clark had been awfully annoyed when he had just asked him if he had made any finds.

CHAPTER IX: TROUBLE FOR SAMBO



THE NEXT MORNING, when Sandy went out, it was so hot and uncomfortable that there didn't seem to have been any cooling night at all. Tip, the cocker, and Sambo, lay on the flagstone walk leading to the barn, and their pink tongues hung out with the heat. Even the twins were stripped for action. Spuggy had on nothing but a pair of very small blue shorts, and the straps of Spinney's sun suit were tied down in back, where they bobbed up and down like a blue cotton tail. As usual her sandals were left behind, and she pranced up to the barn on the balls of her small brown feet. "I think we need a thower," she told Spuggy. "A thprinkelith thower from the hose."

Sandy met them halfway around the barn lugging the heavy hose between them. "What are you doing with that?" he asked.

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Spuggy looked embarrassed and sputtered some hopeless explanation, but Spinney looked at him from under long black lashes with round, innocent eyes. "We're just moving the hothe," she said, "to the back of the barn."

"But why?"

"To the thpigot in back, where ith quiet," she said, and finished off with an unwonted burst of honesty. "And where Joe won't thee uth and get croth."

Sandy grinned to himself as he walked on down to the house with Sambo at his heels. Spuggy was the one who got into trouble but Spinney was the one who had the ideas. He saw Joe hitching Potato Pete up to the hayrake and stopped to pat him.

"Sorry to be taking over your saddle horse," Joe said as he climbed up in the high seat. "But this is an awful big year for hay."

"That's right," Sandy said, and tried not to think about Winsome. He passed the vegetable garden and stopped for a minute to hang over the yellow fence. The weeds were almost solid between the rows of broccoli and the reddish lines of beets. In fact, they were almost solid everywhere, and Father had said that he and Lyb were to have the garden

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weeded by Friday, and today was Thursday. Sandy sighed as he gave a half-hearted jerk at the nearest weeds. Father gave you real jobs to do, and it wasn't any use having an alibi about why you hadn't done them. Father worked hard in the city all week, and when he gave orders about the farm he expected things to fly.

Sandy went on down to the house, but he no longer felt as cheerful as when he had been watching the twins. He knew that Lyb was out riding with Sig and that she was planning to weed in the afternoon. When Lyb worked at all she worked fast, and Sandy knew that she could do her share easily before Friday. As he walked up the front steps he heard a soft, breathless whistle coming from the living room.

He knew from the sound it was Mother. In three more days she and Father were going away on their first real vacation since she had been sick. Right now she was probably doing some last-minute sewing. He went into the room and saw her bent over a dress she was shortening. The moment she heard him she looked up and smiled.

"Not riding?" she asked, and then frowned as though she had just remembered something. "No, of course not. Joe's using Pete, isn't he?"

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Sandy nodded and wondered for one horrible moment if Mother were going to talk about Winsome. He half started for the door, but she stopped him with her next sentence. "How's the collection?" she asked, and moved a little nearer the light. "You've had so much more time to look for things now that the others have been off riding so much."

For a second Sandy wondered if Lyb had told Mother about Winsome, but then he knew that she wouldn't. Lyb often put on an act, and sometimes she said things she didn't mean, but she had never been a telltale. Mrs. Hardwicke kept on quietly sewing, and Sandy was swept with an impulse to tell her all about it. He wanted someone to know, to understand just how he had felt about that horse with the foaming mouth and the wild eyes. He wanted Mother to know, and yet he wondered how she would feel when she knew he was such a coward.

"I—I could have ridden," he said miserably, and stooped to pat Sambo so that his mother wouldn't see his face. "I could have ridden a horse of Sig's, but I didn't."

His mother kept on with her sewing, and her thin face showed no change of expression. "Didn't you want to?" she said.

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For a minute Sandy hesitated, and then the words poured from him. "I did want to! I wanted to awfully, but I was too darned scared. The horse looked awful, and I knew—I just knew I couldn't ride her."

He fidgeted with the books on the library table. Mother hated cowardice worse than anything in the world. He remembered how she had urged him to go into the pool when he was five and the look on her face when he had held back. "I was scared of a perfectly quiet horse," he said. "Sig rode it later, and it looked like old Pete. I was just scared silly."

"What of it?" Mother said unexpectedly. "Everybody's scared sometimes. I'm scared, Lyb's scared, even Dad."

Sandy was so surprised that he looked up. Mother smiled at him, and the smile was neither patronizing nor pitying. She wasn't sorry for him the way Lyb was nor disgusted like Sig.

"But I was frightened of an old cow," he said, to make perfectly sure she understood. "An absolute dope of a horse, and now Sig won't let me ride."

"You'll get over being scared," Mrs. Hardwicke said. "And that's the real test of courage. The person who can do the thing he's afraid of is the real hero. I guess your Indians understood that."

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"I hadn't thought of their ever being afraid. You think of 'em as being so wild and free and sure, somehow."

"Well, they were afraid," Mrs. Hardwicke said. "Probably over and over again. But they conquered it or they wouldn't have survived at all, and that's the part to remember. Fear isn't so important. It's the way you get over it."

Sandy began to say something more, but just then Maggie came into the room to ask about lunch. Sandy started to leave, but his mother held out her hand and drew him toward her. "You're all right," she said. "You've got patience and endurance, and they're the two best kinds of courage."

As Sandy walked out of the house he felt as though he had come upon treasure. Mother understood! More than that, she knew how he had felt and she didn't think he was a coward. He went up to the barn once more, and this time he went right into the garden. He would do his weeding and get it over with.

He went down on hands and knees and pulled up the long, loose lamb's-quarters and the tight, low-growing purslane. The sun beat down on his back and the dry earth choked in his nose. Once he wanted to stop and rest, to throw himself in the deep

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grass beside Sambo, but he fought down the impulse. He had endurance, Mother had said so. He thought of the ordeals the Indians had gone through before they were recognized as braves. Weeding in the sun was nothing. It was less than nothing, but from now on he was going to do things as they turned up.

By lunch time Sandy was finished. He cooled himself off with a swim in the little pool between the willow trees. The water in midsummer was neither deep nor clean, but as he pulled on his loose khaki clothes he felt cool and refreshed.

At lunch he dug into Maggie O'Rourke's good chicken salad with an appetite, and Lyb regarded him enviously. "It's frightfully hot to weed this afternoon," Lyb said. "You're lucky to have finished."

"I thought I'd go down to the island," Sandy said, and helped himself to more iced cocoa. "It ought to be cool down there."

Lyb sighed for all the world like a captive princess in distress. "I wish I were free," she said pointedly, but Mother said nothing and the twins giggled.

Right after lunch Sandy set out for the island. It was fairly cool, as he had hoped, but somehow it seemed lonely without any of the others, and for once he wasn't content just to lie there and day-

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dream. After a few minutes he decided to go into the woods and look for arrowheads. He walked for a long time, jiggling the stone gorget in his pocket. The best time for hunting was after a rain, when the arrowheads stood out clean and white from the ground, but now there hadn't been a rain for weeks and even quite big stones were hidden by the dust.

Sandy walked until he came out on one of the country roads that crossed the Black River. He was tired of the woods, and he moved slowly down the road. When the governesses had been in power he and Lyb hadn't been allowed off the place by themselves, and he still felt pleased and happy at his new freedom.

He walked for several minutes, and two cars passed him. Finally a man in a truck who sometimes delivered groceries for the village store pulled up at the side of the road and stuck his head out of the window. "Want a lift?" he asked. "It's mighty hot for walking."

Sandy nodded, glad to leave the sticky, clinging tar of the road. "Thanks a lot," he said as he climbed in. "How far are you going?"

"Over to Oakley," the man said. "Where are you headed?"

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"Oh, just walking," Sandy said, and eased his tired back against the seat. "Would you drop me off this side of the village?"

A few minutes later the man put him off at the side of the road, and Sandy went back through an open field to the river. He felt refreshed after the lift, and it would be fun to explore a section of the river that he didn't know. He looked around him and, seeing a big gray stone house that he knew belonged to the Andertons, realized that he was several miles south of home. He walked on until he came to the water. Unlike the stretch of river that surrounded Elm Top and the island, the bottom here was hard and gravelly, and he decided to wade across.

He stretched his toes for a few minutes in the cool water and then put on his shoes again and looked around him. He was in a strange wood lot, and he noticed immediately that the trees were bigger and older than the ones at home. Most of the woods were pretty well cleared, but occasionally there were brambles, and he took out his big pocketknife to cut away the briars that grew at the bases of the big maples and oaks.

Finally he came to an opening and stood just out of the hot sunshine to rest. He looked down the cut,

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and his eyes blinked in the sudden light. The opening ran all the way down the wooded hill and across the valley. It was broad and fairly even and Sandy could see there were a great many small stones along the bottom. He studied the cut for a moment and then looked at the endless number of small gray pebbles at his feet. He picked one up, and as he rubbed his fingers over its worn surface he understood. The cut was an old river bed that must have been dry for years and years.

He walked down a little way, remembering that the Indians often used such natural paths through the woods on their way to the open valleys. He made no finds, but the look of the land was encouraging. He saw in his mind's eye the glistening quartz of a dozen shapely arrowheads, but none turned up at his feet. He hoped at any moment to come across a scattered pile of quartz chips that might mark the place where some long-forgotten arrow maker had followed his trade, but there was nothing but the smooth, worn pebbles.

Finally when he was so hot that his khaki shirt was drenched and his scalp felt itchy he began to retrace his steps. He left the river bed at the place where he had come in and then began his way through the

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woods. Suddenly it occurred to him that he would want to come back to search the river bed more thoroughly, and he began to blaze the trees along his way by carefully cutting chips from their trunks. When he was nearly through the woods he looked back and saw with satisfaction that the new-cut wood stood out clearly against the dark shaggy bark. "It's a regular Indian trace," he thought, and knew that he could easily find his way up from the Black River whenever he wanted to.

He walked home along the river, and when he reached the familiar banks where the Black River bordered Elm Top he sat down to rest. He lay still for a moment in the cool, satiny grass and stretched out his tired legs. He put his face down in his arms and realized for the first time that Sambo wasn't there to jump on him and try to lick his cheeks. He sat up and whistled, but there was no sound except the slight stir of the water and in the distance the bob-bobwhite of a quail.

Sandy got up and began to walk toward the island. Perhaps Sig or Lyb had come down and the puppy had stayed there with them. But when he got there the island seemed more deserted than ever. Sandy would have gone home, but just as he turned around

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he heard the high, keening note of a puppy's bark. Sandy cupped his hand to his ear and listened. It was Sambo, all right. He was somewhere beyond the island, but what could he be doing?

Sandy whistled and called and then hurried through the woods on the north side of the island. The high, yapping bark grew louder and louder as he walked along and then slowly fainter, as though the puppy were tiring. Sandy came out on a small field of the O'Haras' and saw a bay mare on the far side of it. He climbed over the stone wall and began to walk across, and the next instant he saw that it was Winsome.

Winsome stood near a post-and-rail fence on the far side of the field that looked out on a marsh of pickerel weed. Her ears pricked forward and her eyes were fastened on something in the marsh. Sandy hurried forward. The yapping was very faint now, but it came from Winsome's direction.

Sandy made himself run, and finally he was across the hot dry field. He glanced at Winsome, and the next moment he saw what she was looking at. It was Sambo! Small, pitiful Sambo, caught halfway out in the swamp. Only his small round head and two big front paws were left above the oozing black mud

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that held him down. As he saw Sandy he clawed at the treacherous mud, but it was no use. He was sinking further and further down into the slime.

Winsome whinnied, and Sandy rolled himself under the fence. "Here, Sambo," he called. "Here, boy." The little dog's ears lifted and he pushed his head forward eagerly. He struggled with all his might, but he could not get free.

Sandy walked into the marsh as far as he dared, but it was no use. With his second steps the mud oozed over his ankles, and he knew that if he went further he would be as helpless as Sambo. He backed out, whistling and encouraging the little dog. Each time he called Sambo lurched forward, but it was quite hopeless. He was caught. So completely caught that he couldn't even brush off the greenish flies that began to circle about him.

Sandy reached the fence almost beside the big mare. He had to get help. He had to get help quickly! It was a long way home, almost as far to the O'Haras'. He looked back at Sambo, and as he saw his soft, pleading eyes his heart beat faster. He had to get help right away or it would be too late.

He started over the fence and at the same instant he saw Winsome. She still stood perfectly quiet, her

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eyes on the struggling puppy. For a minute Sandy straddled the fence as Sig's words echoed through his brain. "You could ride her in a halter. Anyone could."

The mare moved so that she was almost directly beneath Sandy. It would be nothing to slip his leg over her back and be off. But if she shied? If she jerked away with one of her quick frightened motions, then what? Sandy took one more look at Sambo, and the next instant he moved. He swung one long leg over Winsome's back, and the next moment he was mounted.

He wrapped his left hand through her mane and guided her with his right hand and his knees. "Home, girl," he said. "As fast as you can."

Once Winsome had turned he touched her with his sneakered heels, and she broke into a smooth steady canter. For a minute Sandy held his breath, and then gradually he relaxed under the mare's flawless motion. It was exciting and almost fun, if he could only reach help in time.

They came near a gate, and a sharp twist of fright stiffened Sandy's throat. It was one of the tall pull gates that Major O'Hara had had set up, and what if Winsome tried to jump it? Instead she slowed down



*Sandy swung one long leg over Winsome's back,
and the next moment he was mounted*

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to a walk, Sandy pulled open the gate, and they were off again.

They were halfway across the next field when Sandy saw Sig astride Mliss, hitting at an old polo ball. "Sig!" Sandy shouted. "Sambo's in the swamp. Help!"

Sig dropped his mallet, turned Mliss, and cantered toward Winsome. If she turns now, Sandy thought, if she rears . . . ? He sat so far forward his cheeks touched Winsome's mane, but as Mliss came toward her she stood quiet. The next moment she and Mliss cantered steadily toward the swamp. Once as they turned a corner Sig's long leg ground into Sandy's bare one, but he managed to stick on, and a moment later they were at the swamp. "I see him!" Sandy called out, and the next moment he slid to the ground.

He edged his way to the swamp with Sig close behind him. Little Sambo was nearly gone. Only his head, with the pitiful eyes and his thick lolling tongue, showed. Sig strode ankle deep into the mud. "Give me your hand," he ordered. "I can let you out there."

Sandy jerked the top fence rail loose and dropped it in front of him. The wood gave him some pur-

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chase, and with Sig's strong fingers biting into his left wrist he knew he was safe. He stretched himself out until he was almost flat over the ooze and then he reached toward Sambo. He missed and grabbed again. His hand caught wildly at the mud and then closed over the round leather of his collar. "I've got him," he yelled. "Pull!"

They pulled with all their strength. There was a sucking sound. A shout from Sig as he splashed backward into mud and pickerel weed. The next moment Sambo was safe on the field.

For a moment he lay still, and the boys tried scraping the mud from his panting body. Suddenly he stood up, shook himself, and almost before they were sure he was safe he began racing around the field. He slid down on his head, skidded on his tail, and rolled over and over to try and get rid of the mud.

"Whew!" Sig breathed. "Close!"

For a minute Sandy said nothing. Then, as the frantic little dog rushed toward him again, he dropped on his knees and patted and fondled him until he was almost as muddy as Sambo himself. "We got him," he said finally. "We got him in time."

Sig moved back to the horses. Mliss stood where he had left her, and Winsome had moved a little way

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along the fence. Sig walked up to her and held her while Sandy wiped his hands on the grass. "So you rode her," he said, and gently patted the mare's gray nose. "You rode her for fair."

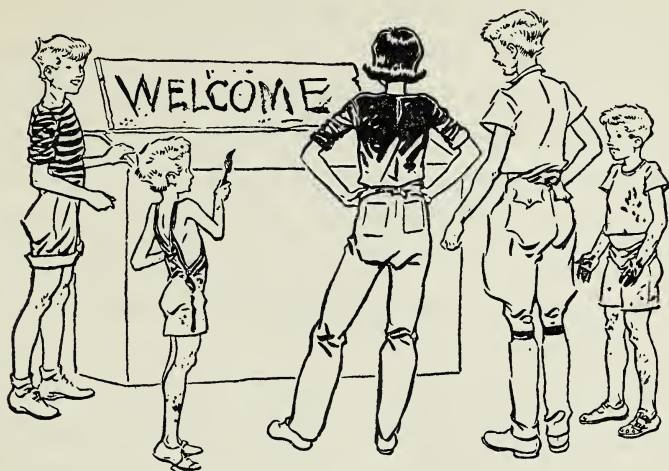
For the first time Sandy felt his morning's weeding, his long hot walk, and his wild ride. "But, Sig," he said, and wished that his knees would stop shaking, "I had to. I couldn't have gotten you otherwise. I know you don't want me to ride her, but——"

Sandy looked over at Sig and saw his broad stocky shoulders shaking with laughter. "Ride her?" he said. "Of course you can ride her. But you didn't seem to want to when she was all bridled and saddled."

Sandy could feel his own face getting a deep, hot red, but now he didn't care. He held Sambo between his knees while he scraped off some more mud. "You mean I can ride her any time I want?"

"You bet you can," Sig said. "And I take it back about you being a sissy."

CHAPTER X: THE PROGRESS AT ELM TOP



THE DAYS after the rescue of Sambo were the best of the summer. There was a sharp thunder shower that night, and the following days were cooler and sparkingly clear. Now that Sandy rode Winsome, he, Sig, and Lyb often went out together and explored the dirt country roads and whatever fields they could get into. Mr. and Mrs. Hardwicke went away on the short vacation they'd been planning, and the children spent more time with the ponies and on the island than ever.

One afternoon, just before the family were to come

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home, they rode over Long Meadow Hill and along Indian Ridge. As they started down the hill Lyb watched Sandy guide Winsome down the slope. He was no longer afraid, but he still rode as cautiously and somehow as heavily as though he were on Potato Pete. When they reached the level meadow in the valley Sig broke into a canter. Sandy leaned forward exactly as though he were driving a tractor and cantered too, and a moment later Lyb came on behind him.

They had one glorious canter across the smooth field. Lyb rose up in her stirrups and swung at an imaginary polo ball. She was no longer afraid of Sunny, and it was even hard to remember why she ever had been afraid. The others stopped, and she cantered once more around the field by herself. Summer was fun, the island was fun, and cantering Sunny over a smooth field was better than flying.

By the time she pulled up Sig was jumping Mliss over a low stone wall. He moved forward at exactly the right time, so it was as though he jumped with his horse. He's good, Lyb thought, and he's nice. Much nicer than you'd expect when his father's so sort of strict and stuffy. I'm even glad he's part of the island.

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A few minutes later they moved sedately toward home, walking their horses three abreast. Sig was coming home with them, as he often did, and led the way up the last hill. They were just within shouting distance of the barn when they saw Spuggy duck into it. He held something heavy, and whatever it was looked round and dark as he hugged it close to his jersey.

A moment later Spinney poked her head around the barn door, saw the horses, and popped back out of sight like a small frightened woodchuck. "Spinney's up to something," Lyb said. "You can always tell when she doesn't want us to see her."

They didn't have to wait long to find out what it was. As they went into the barn the smell of turpentine was even stronger than the horsy-hayey smell of the barn itself. And then they saw the twins! Spuggy had spattered paint on his face, and there were dark rings on his jersey where he had held the paint can. Spinney was even worse. She was covered with big red daubs which she was now decorating with little flourishes of green. As she heard the horses she looked up with the paintbrush still in her hand.

"Spinney Hardwicke, what are you doing?" Lyb asked.

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The thick paint circles around Spinney's eyes made her look like a small flustered owl. She looked first at Lyb and then at the paint can, and for once Spuggy was the first with an explanation. "We're making a welcome," he said, and pointed with a short painty finger to a wide board on the barn floor.

"You're making a what?" Sig and Lyb asked together.

"A welcome!" Spuggy said, as though they were dense not to understand.

"Mother and Father ith coming home tomorrow," Spinney put in. "We're making them a welcome."

Sandy was the first to understand. "They're making a welcome home sign," he said, and picked up the paint-covered board on which several crawling green *S*'s had already begun to melt into the wet red background.

"But why the *S*'s?" Sig asked.

Spinney scowled up at him from under long painty lashes. "It'th the letter we know betht," she said. "Thtoopid."

"We know *S* because it stands for us," Spuggy explained. For a moment Lyb, Sig, and Sandy stared at the paint-spattered children and then they howled with laughter until the horses pricked up their ears.

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"Y-you mean," Sig sputtered, "that *S* is the only letter you know and you thought if you made it enough times it would mean welcome?"

Spuggy nodded, and then as the others roared again his face grew bright red. Suddenly, without warning, his lower lip turned down and the big tears began to trickle down his cheeks. Spinney didn't cry, but her lip trembled and she looked woefully at the board. "We did want to make a welcome," she said. "But it just lookth methy."

Lyb and Sandy pulled themselves together at about the same time. Lyb was still shaking with laughter but she tried to comfort Spuggy, while Sandy struggled hopelessly to get the paint off Spinney with turpentine and an old stable rubber. "Listen, Spinney," she said when she could speak. "It's a swell idea—really. It's the first time Mother's been away since she was sick, and she ought to have a welcome."

"But it's a messy," Spuggy said, and would have kicked at the sign if Sandy hadn't held him. "It's just an awful old messy!"

He still sobbed as Lyb patted his back while she tried to keep him from smearing her jodhpurs with paint. Suddenly she had an inspiration. "Listen,

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Spuggy," she said. "And you too, Spinney, and everybody. Wait until we've changed our clothes and then we'll help you. We'll make a sign, or maybe two signs, and we'll think up lots of other things."

Spuggy began to swallow his sobs and Spinney pulled away from Sandy's scouring. "You mean you'll help uth," she said, "and make the kind of sign we want?"

"Of course," Lyb said, edging away from Spuggy's painty hands. "Of course, but let me change first."

The twins quieted down, and Sandy unsaddled the two horses. Lyb would have gone straight to change, but she saw Sig looking at her and stopped to sponge off Sunny Jim. "I'll be all changed and be back here," she called to him as she squeezed out the sponge, "before you've even got Mliss home."

"Like fun!" Sig said, and wheeled Mliss like a movie cowboy. "Meet you here in ten shakes."

Lyb finished grooming, covered Sunny with a sheet, and charged toward the house. As she pulled off her new jodhpurs she kept her eye on the window to see if she could see Sig coming back. Sig would never bother to change out of his old jodhpurs. Sandy only rode in blue jeans, anyway, and didn't have to change so she'd have to hurry.

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Lyb pulled on a pair of overalls and an old jersey. Sig mightn't care about his riding clothes, but she did. Looking trim was part of the fun of riding, and Lyb wasn't going to have her jodhpurs all paint splattered for any pair of twins.

She got to the stable long before Sig. By the time he came panting up the hill she and Sandy had almost finished cleaning the twins. They dipped their jerseys in fresh turpentine and then washed them out with some saddle soap and water. By the time Lyb had hung them up over the yellow picket fence to dry the others had already started talking plans.

"Are you going to have a party?" Sig asked, and his voice sounded almost envious. "When I lived down in Maryland a fellow I knew went off to school and when he came back his family gave him a welcome home party."

"What kind of a party?" Lyb asked, but Sig was vague.

"I didn't go," he said. "I didn't go much to anything except things like horse shows."

Sandy rocked back and forth on his haunches and frowned. "It couldn't be a party," he said. "They're not enough of us."

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Suddenly Lyb had an idea. "Let's have a Progress," she said. "A Progress would be perfect."

"What's a Progress?" the twins asked as one, and even Sig looked puzzled.

"A Progress is—well, it's a Progress," Sandy said. "They used to have Royal Progresses for the king to go and look at his realm." Suddenly the full possibilities of the idea hit him and his face lightened. "Why, it'd be swell," he said. "We can have everything all fixed up—horses, and the garden, and the whole place—for them to look over when they first come home."

"And we'll fix up old Pete," Lyb went on, "and hitch him to the farm wagon. We could clean it all out, you know, and decorate it with leaves or something, and Mother wouldn't have to walk. We'll drive them all over Elm Top."

"And have an escort," Sandy said. "The twins right in the cart for pages, and all of us riding. You and Mliss'd have to lead off," he said, turning to Sig.

Sig's face looked red and pleased, as though he hadn't been sure that he was going to be asked. "Of course you and Mliss'll lead," Lyb said, and wished that she had thought of asking him first. "It's too

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late to think about costumes, but we can do everything else."

"We might even take 'em to the island," Sig said. "They've heard enough about it, but they've neither of 'em seen it."

"What do I do?" the twins chanted. "What do I do in a Progress?"

"You can do lots of things," Sandy promised. "Finish that sign, for one thing. I'll help you spell it out, and we'll hang it on the buttonwood tree on the island."

From then on there was work for all of them. Sandy found a new clean board and helped the children with the painting while Sig and Lyb worked on the vegetable garden. The vegetable garden was the dullest part, Lyb thought, but it was the first thing Father would notice. Sig pushed the cultivator while she followed after and pulled up the weeds. Finally, when the light feathery rows of carrots, the darker rows of beets, the thick New Zealand spinach, and the big bluish cabbages stood out cleanly between the lines of freshly turned earth, they were ready to start something else.

"I'll do the horses," Sig offered, "while you do the tack."

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"The tack's clean enough," Lyb said as they went into the barn, but Sig shook his head.

"It's a mess, really," he said. "You ought to have even the inside of a saddle just as soft and clean as a new glove."

For a minute Lyb was irritated. It was silly for Sig to fuss over the tack when his own shirts were worn and frayed at the neck and his jodhpurs still stained from the swamp mud. Sig led out Potato Pete and began to curry him as though he were one of his father's hunters, and Lyb settled down to soaping the bridles. After all, if Sig were willing to help it might be better to do what he wanted, even if he was over-fussy about anything to do with horses.

It took longer than Lyb expected. The white horse dander showed up on the saddle and especially the leather saddle girth, and even the bridles weren't perfect. The twins and Sandy had finished the sign, which they propped up on the oat bin, long before Lyb was through. "What'll we do next?" Spuggy demanded, leaving Sandy to put away the paint. "What can Spinney and I do now?"

"You pick some flowers," Lyb said. "The biggest ones you can find and loads of 'em. Sunflowers, maybe, and big zinnias, and lots of Queen Anne's

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lace and goldenrod. It's going to be a job to get the cart fixed up."

When Sig finished with the horses Pete's black sides gleamed and even Sunny's frosty roan had a dull polish. Lyb hung back the last leather strap just as she heard the bossy clatter of Maggie's bell. "We'll finish later," she said as the twins staggered in with armfuls of flowers. "Stick those in a pail, and we'll fix up the cart tomorrow."

"I'll clean it while you eat," Sig said. "Father isn't coming home, so I can be late for supper."

"Oh, Sig, that'll be marvelous," Lyb said, and was glad that she had cleaned all the tack. Sig was annoying sometimes, but when it came to work he was as ready as Sandy to do his share.

The next morning dawned fresh and clear, and Lyb and Sandy went out early to decorate the farm wagon. The family was expected at noon, and there would be time for the Progress before lunch. "There'll be time if you help," Lyb warned the twins as they scampered up to the barns, "and do exactly what I tell you. Otherwise we won't even be able to get the cart finished."

In a few minutes they heard Sig's whistle, and in another moment he trotted around the barn on

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Mliss. Mliss's sides looked more burnished and golden than ever, and as soon as Sig had tied her to one of the old-fashioned horse-headed hitching posts he started on the Hardwicke horses. "I'll really clean 'em up for you," he said. "Yesterday was just a starter."

"The twins and I'll go down to the island with the sign," Sandy said, and Spinney followed him with a bedraggled fish net over her shoulder.

"I'm going to get the thcum off the top of the thwimming pool," she said when she saw Lyb looking at her, "but I promith not to fall in."

Lyb nodded and pulled the wagon out into the farmyard. She began by cutting some long maple switches from the trees along the driveway and fastened them to the sides of the cart with brads. Then she started on the flowers that the others had picked. Sandy's were in neat, orderly bunches with good long stems, but the twins were picked any old way and sometimes thrust into the water headfirst. Lyb salvaged the best and tucked them in through the maple branches against the cart.

For a moment she wasn't sure if it would work, and then as she saw how the sunflowers stood out in big tawny patches against the dark green she began

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humming. It was going to go. She could tell already. It was like a poem when every single rhyme came by itself without a struggle.

By the time Sig was through grooming Lyb was all finished except for the seat. That still looked stiff and ugly and not at all right for a Progress.

“That’s swell,” Sig said as he began to brush Tip, the cocker. “It’s really nifty. Much better than I thought it would be.”

Lyb felt warm with pleasure but she only shook her head. “Seat’s punk,” she said. “What could we do about that?”

Sig stopped brushing Tip and began on Bingle, while Sambo curled in and out through his legs to get some attention. “You might take the seat right out,” he said slowly, “and put in bags of oats to sit on. They’d be comfortable, and maybe you could stick some flowers right through the sacking to dress ’em up.”

“Sig O’Hara, that’s a real idea,” Lyb said, and between them they lugged two bags of oats out of the barn and up into the cart.

Just then Sandy and the twins came back from the island, and the twins clamored to get up into the cart. “Let us do that,” Spuggy pleaded as Lyb began

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to stick flowers into the sacking. "Let us do that now!"

For a moment Lyb hesitated and then she hauled Spuggy and Spinney up beside her. After all, if the Progress was to welcome Mother and Father home it would make it nicer if everybody helped. "You stick 'em in this way," she said, and showed them how to stick bachelor's-buttons and black-eyed Susans in through the sacking. "You have to use the flowers with the stiffest stems."

The twins worked clumsily, breaking off the flowers and dropping their heads. For a minute Lyb didn't think she could bear to watch them, but finally Spinney caught on. In a little while an uneven row of blue and yellow flowers lined the side of each sack. Just then the old-fashioned stable clock rang the quarter hour.

"Time to get dressed," Sandy said, and struggled to keep Sambo from chewing the wreath of flowers he had woven around his collar. "We've got the horses and dogs all fixed, but we ought to get ready ourselves."

"But we haven't fixed Pooker!" Spinney said, and Spuggy started toward the little pig's pen. "We haven't fixed Pooker or my kitten, and they're the very nicest pets of all."

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Lyb pulled at her double-jointed finger, in and out of joint. It was a quarter of twelve, and the family might be here any minute. With each sound of a passing car on the road she thought she heard them turn up the driveway. "But we've got to get dressed," she said. "We've got to get dressed quickly."

"I'll fix up the cat and the pig," Sig said suddenly. "I don't need to go home and change, anyway."

Lyb looked at him gratefully, and for the first time it occurred to her that Sig didn't like to go home. "And I don't blame him," she thought as she hurried down the hill. "His father's awfully nice to me but he's plenty cross to Sig."

Lyb hurried into her jodhpurs while Sandy put on a clean blue shirt and his blue jeans. The twins pulled on their Indian suits while Maggie helped them with the laces. "Sure, 'tis the grand idea you've had for a celebration," she told Lyb. "Himself and the missus'll be as pleased as a pair of two-year-olds."

Lyb smoothed out her necktie with the brown foxes' heads on it and hurried up the hill. It was nice to have approval, nice to have people pleased with you, even if the people were only Maggie and the twins. Somehow it was more fun than baiting even the very worst of the governesses.

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Sig had made a little wreath for Spinney's kitten and had shined up the pig's collar and fastened it to a leash. "We've got to take Pooker in the wagon," Spuggy said as Sandy lifted him in.

"And we've got to take the kitty," Spinney added. "I'm sure Mother'd want the kitty."

For a minute Lyb hesitated. The cart looked really lovely with its sheathing of green and yellow. It might have been a prize exhibit in the county fair, but now with the cat and the pig it would just be funny. She saw Spuggy's face begin to crumple and she handed up the limp kitten and the hard, bristling little pig without another word. The twins settled down with smiling faces under their Indian war bonnets. Sig began to back Pete into the traces, and Spinney leaned down to give Lyb a hug. "I think you're nithe," she said. "Very nithe!"

Lyb pulled herself free and mounted Sunny. She felt warm, and happy, and pleasantly excited. The horses and the garden looked fine, the cart was a knock-out, and she was glad that she had stayed nice to the twins.

Sandy had hardly climbed into the wagon and gathered up the reins when they heard the sharp toot-toot of a horn in their own driveway. "They're

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here!" Sig shouted, exactly as though it were his own family who was coming home. "They're here! Tally-ho! Forward march!"

They rolled on down the hill from the barn. Sig and Mliss were in the lead, and Lyb and Sunny were just ahead of the wagon. Once Pooker tried to jump out, but Sandy pulled him back with his right hand while he drove with his left. There were no other troubles, and they pulled up at the front door just behind the family.

"Welcome home!" Lyb shouted, and all the others joined in. "Welcome home! Welcome home! And now get into the wagon for the Royal Progress over Elm Top."

It worked out even better than Lyb had hoped. Mother was so excited she kissed everybody, even Sig, twice. Father kissed Lyb and the twins, patted the boys on the back, and then swung Mother up into the cart as though she were Spinney. "The cart's wonderful," he said as Lyb rode Sunny Jim up alongside. "It's just as pretty as it can be, and you were awfully clever."

Lyb gulped and pulled back a little as Sig made Mliss prance and curvet like a circus horse. Mother liked the Progress and Father liked the Progress, and





*“Welcome home!” Lyb shouted, and all the others joined in.
“Welcome home! Welcome home!”*

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he wasn't making fun of one single thing. When they passed the neat vegetable garden he whistled and shook his head. "That took real work," he told Lyb. "Real work and real patience."

"Sig helped," Lyb said, "while Sandy and the twins worked at other things. We all did something."

"That makes it perfect," Mother said, and her face was young and gay the way it used to be before she had ever been sick at all. "That's the very nicest part."

They took the cart as near to the island as they could and then walked the rest of the way. "See the sign?" Spuggy demanded as soon as they were out of the woods. "We mostly made it, and Sandy put the Christmas tree branches around it for a picture frame." He pointed to where Sandy had hung the wooden sign framed in fir twigs against the trunk of the big buttonwood tree.

Lyb heard him, but for the first time she wasn't thinking about what either Mother or Father said or did. There was something different and unfamiliar about the island. The barn was the same, the buttonwood was the same, but something, that she couldn't put her finger on, was queer.

She looked up at Sig as he came out of the barn

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and saw that he was frowning. "Somebody's been here!" he said. "The oat bin was moved, and there are big footprints all over the inside of the barn." He pointed behind Lyb. "And I see they're out here too," he said, "going right down to the river."

"So that's what looked funny," Lyb said as she looked at the footprints that had spoiled the neat rake marks on the path. "But who could have been here?"

CHAPTER XI: A PAPER CHASE AND A QUESTION



WHOEVER IT WAS who had come onto the island never came back, and after a few days Lyb stopped wondering about it. None of their stable things had been disturbed, and although the oat bin had been moved out of a corner of the barn, none of the

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oats had been taken. With the excitement of having the family back and Mother almost as well and sunburned as she had been before she had ever had to go out West Lyb stopped worrying about the footprints.

“Probably just another tramp like the man who told us about Black Feather,” Sig said, and they left it at that.

First of all there were the family’s presents. Cowboy suits for the twins, a real leather writing case for Lyb, and brand-new moleskin jodhpurs for Sandy. For a moment he looked disappointed, and Lyb knew that he would rather have had some more books or a case for his collection. “You see, I knew you’d be riding again before we got back,” Mrs. Hardwicke said, and Sandy grinned. When he finally put on the jodhpurs he looked almost as pleased and proud as Lyb had been when she had first gotten hers.

“I guess we got them just in time,” Mother said when she was sure that they fitted. “Mrs. Gavin called up this morning and asked if you all would like to go over to Oakley for a paper chase.”

“Can we go?” Lyb asked, and Mrs. Hardwicke nodded.

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"Of course," she said. "And Mrs. Gavin wanted you to bring Sig too. She said you could ride your horses over the day before and stable them in her barn so they'd be fresh for the paper chase on Thursday. The paper chase is going to be in the morning, and then there's going to be a picnic lunch."

"Boy," Lyb said, "that'll be something. We've never been in a paper chase, and it'll be almost as good as hunting."

"And you can ride Pete." Mrs. Hardwicke turned to Sandy. "I spoke to Joe and he said he could spare him. I'd rather you didn't use a borrowed horse for something like a paper chase."

"Great!" Sandy said. His face looked relieved, though Lyb wondered how he could be satisfied with a plug like Pete after a fast little mare like Winsome. "That's perfect, and of course Sig'll ride Mliss. He'll just eat up a paper chase."

But that afternoon when they met down at the island Sig wasn't enthusiastic. When the Hardwicks got there he sat under the buttonwood tree with his arms round his legs and his head on his knees. When he looked up his face was almost as red and wrinkled as Spuggy's when he had been crying.

"We've been asked to a paper chase," Lyb told

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him. "Way over at the Gavin's at Oakley, and you can ride Mliss over the day before."

Sig hardly answered, and Lyb almost shook him. "It's a paper chase!" she said again. "A paper chase on horseback, with a picnic after and prizes and everything. You're invited specially, and Mliss."

Sig got up and turned to where Mliss was grazing a few feet behind him. "Mliss is going to be sold," he said. "Father told me this morning."

For a full minute Lyb said nothing as the meaning of Sig's words crept over her. Mliss was going to be sold. Mliss who was Sig's pet, his love. She looked at Sandy, and his round eyes were dark with sympathy. "When—when is she going?" Sandy asked, and it was as though he were speaking about someone already dead.

"Sometime this fall. Don't know just when."

"But why?" Lyb asked. "Why, when you love her so much?"

Sig turned on her, and his freckled face was a hot, ugly red. "Because Father doesn't care," he said fiercely. "It's no point my even telling him. I'd just like to run away and take Mliss with me."

Instantly Lyb's imagination kindled, and she struck a pose. "Fly to the marshes," she said, and

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waved her hand to where the dragon flies glided over the swamp. "Hide where the wily red man hid his women and children."

Sig turned on his heel, and as she saw his face Lyb knew it was no time for acting. "Sig," she said, and now her voice was her own, "I was just fooling. I know you couldn't hide Mliss, but we ought to be able to do something. Maybe Mother could help."

Sig shook himself free of Lyb's hand. "Nobody can help," he said. "Not anybody in the world. Father wants to sell Mliss because she's not a show horse or a hunter. Now she's perfectly trained he can get a good price for her for some dope of a kid who'll pull her, and haul her, and just *ruin* her!" As he finished Sig picked up a big stone that had been lying at his feet and hurled it into the water with such fury that Lyb was almost frightened.

"But does your father know?" she persisted. "Have you told him how you feel about her?"

Sig shook his head, and his lips made a hard, stubborn line. "No use," he said. "Wouldn't do any good. But now tell us about this old paper chase. I—I might as well use Mliss while I've still got her."

For the next few days Lyb felt as though everything they did with Sig was like pushing a boulder

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uphill. He never spoke about Mliss again. Once when Sandy brought her name up he turned on him as sharply as he had the day Sandy had funkcd riding Winsome.

The following Wednesday they rode the horses over to the Gavins, who lived on the other side of the Black River. It was a long ride through pleasant rolling country, but nobody enjoyed it. Sig was as careful as ever about picking out dirt roads and keeping Mliss over on the grassy edges when they had to cross macadam, but he was no fun to ride with. Once when they came to a particularly tempting open field Lyb gave a shout and cantered across the close-cropped grass with Sandy clumping along behind her. Usually Sig was in the lead, but this time when Lyb looked back he was trotting along as somberly and sedately as though he were going to a funeral.

Even when they got to the wide gravel driveway that led to the cluster of buildings that made up the Gavin's stables Sig didn't cheer up. "Look at those hunters," Sandy said, and pointed to three big, round-limbed creatures that stood in the shade of a chestnut tree behind a whitewashed fence. Mliss whinnied and Sunny snorted aggressively, but Sig

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hardly even looked up as the hunters trotted over to the fence to see them. "Golly, look at those stables," Sandy breathed. "A whole village of 'em."

But Lyb had no eyes for buildings. She was looking at May and Tenant Gavin as they came down the hill to meet them. May and Tenant were only a year and two years older than Lyb, but they both had on beautiful covert cloth breeches and boots. And such tweed jackets! They were perfectly pressed and looked as though they had been molded over the Gavin shoulders.

"Hello, Lyb," May Gavin said. "Hello, Sandy. And you must be Sig O'Hara. We're so glad you could come."

May's smile was really friendly and her voice was enthusiastic. And Tenant was friendly too. "We're putting you up in the west barn," he said, and led the way into one of the gleaming white buildings. They walked across a courtyard paved with wooden bricks and into a big airy stable that smelled of horses, and fresh paint, and warm sunshine on new straw.

Sandy gave a low whistle as they followed the Gavins down the long row of box stalls, and even Sig's expression changed. The painted walls were

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lined with hunting prints, there were polished name plates over each stall, and even the rings made to hold the tie ropes were specially made into the shape of hounds and fox heads. The Gavin's stable was a palace for horses, and even Major O'Hara's neat, workmanlike quarters paled in comparison.

"Some tack room," Sandy said as they passed a room that was lined with row after row of beautifully kept English saddles and russet bridles.

"And some horses!" Lyb said as they passed hunters that were even better looking than the horses in the field.

But May Gavin made just as much fuss over Mliss and the Hardwicks' horses, and Tenant asked specially just what they were used to being fed. After a few minutes Mrs. Gavin came down to the stable in a blue hat and dress that looked like something out of a fashion magazine. She asked after Mrs. Hardwicke and the twins, and in a few minutes Lyb and Sandy felt as at home as if they saw the Gavins once or twice a day instead of once or twice a summer. The Gavins always had been nice, Lyb remembered, even if May was supposed to be the prettiest girl for miles around and Tenant was the brightest boy and the best athlete.

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By the time Mrs. Gavin left them at the entrance to the overgrown drive Lyb was so excited about the paper chase that she could hardly wait for the next day, and even Sandy was chatting about the Gavin's stable as though he'd thought about nothing but horses and hunters all his life. Only Sig was silent and glum. He got out of the car without speaking and didn't even wave to Mrs. Gavin when she turned her car around in the Pocono Road.

Lyb remembered his face when he had left Mliss in the Gavin's wide box stall and said nothing, but suddenly Sig began to talk himself. "Don't know why I let you get me into this," he said angrily. "All those good hunters. Madison Square Garden jobs. They'll just make Mliss look like a screw!"

"But—but, Sig," Lyb said, and Sandy stood open-mouthed on the small lawn. "But—but, Sig, it's all for fun, you know. And besides, Mliss is wonderful. She'll shake hands, and stand where you leave her, and—and come when you whistle——"

"Don't I know that?" Sig asked bitterly. "But my old man doesn't, and that's what counts. You forget he's going to be there tomorrow."

The Hardwicks walked toward the house, but for once Sig refused to come and trudged doggedly

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homeward. As Lyb watched him disappear slowly over the hill she began to understand. Sig wasn't a poor sport, not for a minute. It was just his father. His good-looking father, who was so kind and pleasant to Lyb and so cross to poor Sig. For the first time Lyb was sure of something she had suspected during their jumping lessons. Sig was afraid of his father, and Major O'Hara hated to have anyone afraid. He wanted nothing but fearless, dashing champions around him. His hunters had to be champions, and his dogs, and, most important of all, his only son. Sig had to win when he went into things or his father thought less of him than ever.

The next day when Mother took them over to the Gavin's Lyb knew she was right. There were twelve children and four grownups there ahead of them and all mounted on great beautiful horses that later on would carry them over the stiff fences of the Fairbrook hunt. Mother and Major O'Hara had come over to see them start off and stood near one of the paddocks looking at the Gavin's leggy yearling colts. When Major O'Hara saw Lyb he took off his hat as though she were a princess. Then he called out to Sig in a voice that made Lyb squirm: "Sit up straight, Sigourney. You look like a sack of meal."

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Lyb looked desperately at Mother to see if she couldn't do something. But Mother was busy talking to some other people who had joined them, and it was no use.

Mr. Gavin started the riders off from the south field. There were small scraps of paper lying on the ground, and he told them they had been laid in a trail over the neighboring countryside. They were to follow the paper, find their way back to the Gavin's, and the first one in was to hunt for the prize that was hidden at the end of the trail. "A good ride and good luck!" Mr. Gavin called, and swung open the big gate.

Sunny Jim gave a loud compelling neigh, and from the other side of the field old Pete answered it. Lyb gripped with her knees and followed Tenant Gavin through the gate as Sunny Jim broke into his rolling canter. For a moment Lyb forgot Sig. The day was bright and sunny. Their trail was clearly marked by the scatterings of paper, and Sunny was marvelous. Lyb had never been hunting, but this was what it must be like. Good horses, good weather, the clink of bits, the pounding of hoofs, and the sweeping thrill of many people riding fast together.

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Lyb felt herself deep and secure in the saddle. "Well done, Sunny," she said, as though he were a big Irish hunter just over a bank jump. "Well done, big boy. We'll be in at the kill."

But by the end of the second long hill Lyb had Sig on her mind again. The huddle of riders had strung out into little groups of two and three far ahead of them. Way off in the valley Tenant Gavin, Mr. Paulding, and little Jimmy Paulding, who looked like a monkey mounted on his father's big hunter, pounded toward home. Behind that May Gavin and Sis Eustis were still trying to make up their minds which was to follow the trail through the woods, and the other riders came just after that.

Only Sig and the Hardwickses, with their two ponies and one plow horse, were really left behind. Potato Pete was already exhausted and refused to be urged into more than a heavy jog. Sunny Jim's sides heaved, and even Mliss was dangerously hot.

"We've got to stop or they'll founder," Sig said as they followed the scraps of paper that by now had been blown or trampled by the passing hoofs of the other horses.

Lyb drew rein and patted Sunny's wet neck. "Boy, that was fun," she said as they reached the welcome

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shade of the woods. "Like real hunting in Leicestershire, only without jumps."

"It was swell," Sandy said, posting awkwardly in his new jodhpurs.

Only Sig said nothing, and Lyb knew that from his point of view it was anything but swell. Their ponies were outclassed—hopelessly outclassed by the big handsome hunters ahead of them, and, unlike Mother or Dad, Major O'Hara cared!

Lyb watched Sig as he led the way into the woods. He rode as well as anyone there, but his legs were too long for Mliss and he looked awkward and shaggy. His clothes were a mess and his hair needed cutting, and he was so discouraged he didn't even sit up straight. Lyb guided Sunny around a woodchuck's hole and sighed. It was all a horrid, cruel circle that nobody could break. The major wanted Sig to be easy and friendly in company, like Tenant or May, or even grave and polite like Sandy, and that just made Sig clumsier and more awkward than ever. Horses were their only real bond, and now the major was threatening to take away Mliss, who was the heart and core of Sig's love for riding.

Suddenly, as they came out into open again, Lyb had an idea. It was a crazy, cheeky idea, but as

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Lyb blinked in the strong sunlight her mind was made up. She was going to ask Major O'Hara to let Sig keep Mliss! If it was the last thing she ever did, she was going to ask him that today.

Sandy had had an idea too. He stopped prodding Pete, and the great heavy horse automatically stopped dead. "Listen," he said. "Why can't we short-cut? The Indians used to follow the tops of the ridges instead of going down into the valleys. It'd save us going up and down another hill."

Sig turned on him, but he was no longer either cross or bitter; he only sounded tired and utterly hopeless. "No use," he said. "You can't do that in a paper chase. We've just got to follow the trail and take our licking."

They rode on, trotting, and cantering, and walking again when the horses needed the rest. Once or twice it seemed to Lyb that they gained on the other riders, but the distances between them stayed much the same. By the time they were on the home stretch the others had all dismounted. They had one more good hard gallop across the last field, but no one except Sandy really enjoyed it. Even when Lyb settled down to Sunny's canter she could no longer pretend she was a young English fox hunter gallop-

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ing over the moors. She was just Lyb Hardwicke. Foolish Lyb Hardwicke, who had promised herself to ask a question it would take every ounce of her nerve to ask.

Tenant Gavin came out into the field to meet them. "Jimmy Paulding won," he said as he patted Sunny's hot neck. "He went right to where the prize was hidden like a setter after a bird."

Lyb got off and loosened her girth strap. She saw Jimmy Paulding brandishing a shiny new hunting crop and watched Sandy go over to congratulate him. Sandy looked at the crop and then chatted with Jimmy and the other boys who crowded around him. For the first time in her life Lyb really envied him. Nice, simple, good-natured Sandy. He was perfectly content just to have ridden without falling off. He would never worry himself so because Major O'Hara was cross and Sig unhappy.

Their picnic lunch was spread out on a little hill beyond the stables. They could see the visitors' horses tied in a long line to the white courtyard fence. The horses were covered in neat tan sheets or plaid woolen coolers, and the dull thump of their feet sounded pleasantly up the short hill.

It was all like a picnic in an English storybook.

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People in riding clothes eating delicious food that was set out of doors for them on white-spread tables. Ordinarily Lyb would have reveled in it, but now as she watched Sig sitting glumly apart with his eyes on Mliss, the buttery beaten biscuit, the steak sandwiches, and even the chocolate ice cream were no more enticing than Maggie O'Rourke's warmed-over stew.

When lunch was over Mrs. Hardwicke called for them in the family Ford, and Sandy climbed into the front seat beside his mother. "Where's Major O'Hara?" he asked as they turned out of the Gavin's drive. "I kind of thought he'd stay for the finish."

"He had to go to Fairfield for the afternoon," Mrs. Hardwicke said. "So I took him home when I went back for lunch."

Sandy said nothing but looked back at Lyb with eyebrows like question marks, and for the first time Lyb wondered if Sandy understood more than he let on.

They left Sig at his home, and as Lyb climbed into the front seat she knew that she was free for that day. If the major was away there was no chance of her asking him about Mliss. But the time would come. Sooner or later the time would come, and Lyb knew

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that no matter how much she wanted to avoid talking to Major O'Hara she could not break the promise she had made in her own heart.

The time came the very next morning, when they rode the horses back from the Gavin's. Sig said that his father was expecting him for a jumping lesson, and Lyb and Sandy escorted him home. Once, as they passed the island, Lyb's courage nearly failed. What if Major O'Hara got mad, and she knew from Sig that sometimes he grew terrifically angry. What if he forbade Sig to play with the Hardwicks, and they had to give up the riding club? Still, without Mliss, Sig would always be as gruff and gloomy as he had been for the past few days, and the riding club would be spoiled anyway.

Her chance came earlier than she had expected. She and Sig went around Major O'Hara's course of jumps, and Sig and Mliss made a perfect performance. "You've done very well with that mare," Major O'Hara said when they stopped where he and Sandy were standing. "She's really a credit to you."

"Now," Lyb dared herself. "Now you've got to ask him!"

"You wouldn't really sell Mliss, would you, Major

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O'Hara?" she asked, and her voice sounded fresh and silly in her own ears.

For the first time since she had known him Major O'Hara looked startled. "Why, why ever not?"

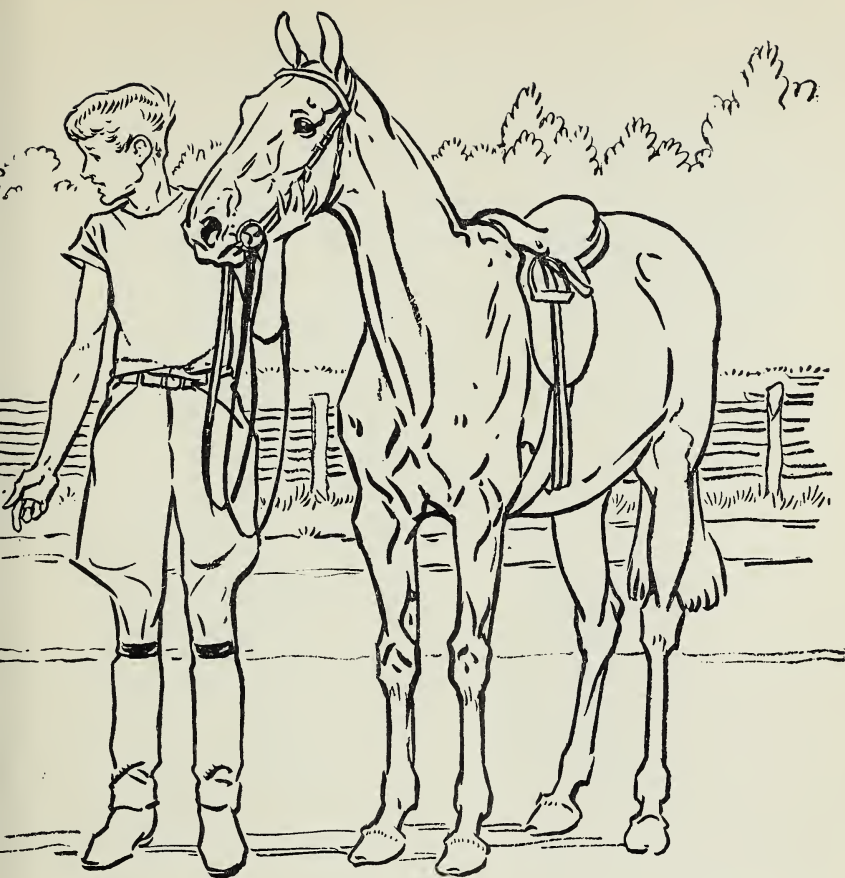
Help came from an unexpected source. "Because she wouldn't go like that for anyone but Sig, would she?" Sandy asked, and his quiet voice was pleasant and polite. "She goes for Sig the way Barnegat and Tipperary go for you."

Major O'Hara hesitated for a moment, and Lyb knew that it was her turn again. It was an act, a hard, hard act; different and infinitely more important than any other pretense she had ever tried. "Miss has certainly improved this summer," Lyb said, just as though she knew all about horses, like Mr. or Mrs. Gavin. "I—I suppose you're waiting to see what she does in the horse show."

Suddenly Major O'Hara laughed. "Oh, so that's it, is it? Sig wants to ride in the horse show. Well, I'll make you a promise. If he gets a blue ribbon with her he can keep her as long as I've got stable room."

Just then Patrick called Major O'Hara to the stable, and the three of them were left alone. "There!" Lyb said, and the word came out in a





"It's no use," Sig said. "Miss has no more chance of winning a blue at Oakley than I have of flying."

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whistling explosion of relief. "There, Sig O'Hara. What do you think of that?"

"I think you're swell," Sig said slowly. "And Sandy too. You both wanted to help."

"Wanted to help? *Wanted* to help? What are you talking about? We did help. It's all fixed."

Sig looked at Lyb and then slowly he shook his head. "It's no use," he said. "Mliss has no more chance of winning a blue at Oakley than I have of flying."

CHAPTER XII: HORSE SHOW AND AN INDIAN TRACE



MOTHER sorted out the mail at breakfast and handed a big envelope to Lyb. Even before Lyb saw the small red horse's head in the left-hand corner she knew it was the entry blanks for the horse show. As soon as they had finished their pancakes and syrup

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Lyb and Sandy went out on the porch to study the classes. Hunters, polo ponies, brood mares, and saddle horses. There seemed to be dozens of classes for every known type of horse except a small, part Welsh, part polo pony like Mliss. "The thing that Mliss is best at," Sandy said as they read over class after class, "is doing what Sig wants. But that doesn't seem to count in horse shows."

Lyb began to feel worried and uncertain. Suppose there was no chance for Mliss after all. Suppose they had just coaxed Sig into one more hopeless try where he would be beaten and his father more set on replacing Mliss than ever.

Lyb started to pace up and down the porch like a sea captain pacing the deck of a distressed vessel. For a moment Sandy sat still, and then he started down the high front steps. "Come on down to the island," he said. "We can think better down there."

Lyb followed without another word. Sandy was perfectly right. Once you were within the cool protecting shadow of the buttonwood tree problems began to solve themselves. It was on the island they had first seen Sig, fought with him, and then made friends. It was from the island she had first mustered the courage really to ride Sunny Jim, and on the

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island they had rebuilt the old barn without help from anyone.

But when they reached the island they found Sig was ahead of them, and in his hands was another copy of the prize list. "It looks bad," he said as they crossed over the log. "There isn't a thing."

"How about the horsemanship classes?" Sandy asked, but Sig shook his head.

"Wouldn't count. It's got to be Mliss who wins the ribbon."

"Then we've got to find the next best," Lyb said. "Where your riding would help and where Mliss's conformation wouldn't matter so much."

Sig smiled glumly. "That sounds like the touch-and-go," he said, "but Mliss is too small for those jumps."

Sandy had settled down on his haunches and was poring over the prize list as though it were De Forest's *History of the Indians of Connecticut* or Wooley's *Digging Up the Past*. "Listen," he said suddenly. "What d'you think of this one? 'John R. Blashfield Trophy. For horses over 14 hands and under 15.2 suitable for park and cross-country riding. Limited to horses owned and ridden by residents of Fairbrook or Millerton counties who have not heretofore

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won a first or second prize in a recognized horse show. Horses to be ridden over fields, trails, and in the ring. Time twenty-five per cent, way of going twenty-five per cent, condition at end of trial twenty-five per cent, conformation twenty-five per cent.’”

“Well, what about it?” Sig asked, and began rubbing up Mliss’s bridle. “You’d probably get some of the best hacks in the country. Everybody thinks their saddle horse can go cross country.”

“But you wouldn’t get the best,” Sandy insisted, and read over the line “‘limited to horses who have not won a first or second in any recognized horse show.’ That lets out a lot of ’em.”

“There’s still the conformation,” Sig said gloomily. “You could just count out that twenty-five per cent.”

“You might not,” Lyb said, and looked over Sandy’s shoulder at the prize list. “You might get a judge who liked Mliss’s build. I do.”

Sig read over the description again, slowly and haltingly. Finally he handed it back to Sandy and went back to rubbing his leather. “Might as well try,” he said. “It’s the kind of class you can’t really tell about until the day of the show. Besides, it’s the only one she wouldn’t get the gate in automatically.”

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For the next few weeks they spent the best part of their time in getting Mliss ready. Exercise every morning. Sig took long, careful rides with Lyb or Sandy as an escort. Then a rubdown, rest, and plenty of water and good clean oats, and then a short ride around one of the fields in the afternoon. The horse show was to be on the twenty-seventh of August, and it seemed to Lyb that the day took on a new importance, like Christmas or a very special birthday.

Finally it was the twenty-fifth, and Sig gave Mliss a last light ride. The next day he took her over to the show grounds. The Oakley show was held on Mr. Andrew Belknap's property beyond the Anderton and the Gavin farms. It was a one-day show patronized mostly by people in the neighborhood, but to Lyb it suddenly seemed more important than the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden or the Olympia in London.

Mrs. Hardwicke drove them over early in the morning and left them at the gate. "I'll meet you here about three," she said, "when I bring the twins. I'll be here in plenty of time for Sig's class. I hope that won't be too long for you."

Lyb and Sandy waved and hurried past the newly

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erected ticket booth to where a line of cars was already parked around an open field edged by a dirt track. Too long? As Lyb looked at the horses being led around the track, at the people hurrying past in riding clothes, at the waving flags, and the boy selling programs she wondered if you could ever stay too long at a horse show. It was hard to believe that last year she hadn't even come to this show and that horses had been just something you rode once in a while at a livery stable or farm horses that Joe used to plow the fields at Elm Top.

Sandy had already found the right place in the program. "This is just a class for farm mares with foal at foot," he read, and then pointed to the score board that had been set up at one end of the field. "We'd better find Sig now."

Lyb hung back to look at the big, strapping farm mares and the small, long-legged colts that followed close behind them. One chestnut colt with a little white star on his forehead got separated from his mother as she was led slowly around the ring. For a moment he stood on braced legs, head erect. The next minute the mare whinnied, and the little colt ran bucking and squealing back to his mother's side.

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"They're adorable," Lyb said. "I wish we had one." She could have watched them indefinitely, fascinated by the little creatures who stayed close to their mothers without either halter or lead. Now Sandy pulled her away from the ringside to the line of open sheds behind Mr. Belknap's big stable.

This was where the horses were kept until it was time for them to go into the ring. Lyb took a deep excited sniff of the crisp horsy air. This place was the very core of the horse show, and Lyb wished with all her heart that she were going to be in it.

People rode up and down, up and down in front of the stalls, waiting for their class. Other horses, carefully covered in bright wool coolers, already had blue or red rosettes fluttering from their temporary stalls. Still others were being led slowly around, while here and there a horse held by two halter shanks was being rubbed to an even greater perfection.

"Wonder where Sig is?" Sandy said, but Lyb only shook her head. She was trying to see, smell, and hear everything at the same moment. She heard the excited whinny of the horses, the good-natured talk of the men, and an occasional burst of loud laughter. Suddenly there was a sharp, compelling blast on a

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bugle, and the farm mares were led out. "Get ready for class twenty-three," a man called through a megaphone. "Get ready for class twenty-three. Mares suitable to produce polo ponies." In another moment a line of mares in new show halters was led past them, and another class was under way.

They passed the small trophy tent where the big silver cups glistened in the bright sun. "Next year"—Lyb gripped Sandy's arm—"next year we're both going to be in this."

Suddenly Sandy saw Sig and dashed almost in front of a high-stepping saddle horse to reach him. "Sig," he said, "Sig O'Hara, we're here. Where's Mliss?"

Sig turned, and for a second Lyb was afraid they had called to the wrong boy. But it was Sig; so new, so neat, so brushed, that he looked unfamiliar. It wasn't just the clothes, Lyb decided, although the perfectly fitting tan jodhpurs and the new tweed coat were strange enough. It wasn't even the close haircut that made his usually shaggy head look thin and sleek. It was his whole face and expression that looked different.

"Hello, Hardwickes," he said, and led the way to where Mliss stood in the last temporary stall beyond

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Major O'Hara's big hunters. "Have you heard about the class?"

Lyb shook her head, and Sandy offered Mliss a piece of sugar. "Fifteen horses in it," Sig said, "and Mliss is the smallest of the bunch. The trail's through the Oakley woods any way you choose, across the Gavin's fields, and back into the ring for the final judging. Captain Tom Clinton's the judge, and Paddy Ryan says he likes thoroughbreds."

After Lyb had patted Mliss and Sig had made sure that she was perfectly comfortable they went back to the ring. The classes followed one after the other with few delays. They watched the horsemanship class, and as Lyb saw May Gavin ride out of the ring with a blue ribbon on her horse's bridle she wished all over again that she were going to be in the show. She turned to tell Sig so, but as she looked at his white, drawn face she wasn't quite so sure. "What's the matter?" she asked as the first horse in a jumping class thundered around the ring. "You and Mliss can do anything."

"Oh, sure," Sig said, but his voice sounded unconvinced. "At least Mliss can do anything. But I don't even know the country we're riding through. We—we've stuck so much to the woods and the

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fields around the island that I've never even been in the Oakley woods."

"Well, you'll manage," Lyb said. "You ride better than anyone else. Doesn't he, Sandy?"

Sandy nodded but his face was blank, and it was clear that he had been daydreaming and hadn't heard a word.

When they went to the refreshment tent Lyb and Sandy ate several hot dogs and drank Coca-Cola, but Sig hardly ate anything. He knew few of the children that stopped to talk to the Hardwickes, but occasionally he nodded to one of the older men and he knew all the grooms. "Lots of these people follow the regular summer circuit," he said once. "Devon, Long Branch, Monmouth County. They go to all of the shows. The competition's going to be stiff."

"Well, you look better than any of 'em," Sandy said, and nodded at Sig's new clothes. "And you certainly can ride better."

Sig's grin was half-hearted. "Father bought the clothes after the paper chase," he said. "But Paddy Ryan says you always take a spill in a new coat, so I'll probably go head over teakettle."

For a moment Lyb stared at Sig's freckled face. Was he really afraid? His eyes avoided hers, and she

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walked away to buy an ice-cream cone. The man behind the ice-cream counter grinned familiarly. "Hello," he said. "How're things with you?"

Lyb stared at his pale face and hooked nose and wondered where she had seen him before. "Made any Indian finds lately?" the man asked, and suddenly Lyb remembered. He was the tramp who had come up to them on the island! She shook her head and dashed back to the others.

"Sig! Sandy!" she said. "Look—not now, but look. That's the man who came on the island."

Sandy looked with real interest, but Sig couldn't take his mind off the horse show. "Same fellow, all right," he said, and then led the way to the door. "Let's get back to the ring. Father's jumping Barnegat in this class."

They watched two or three exhibitors, and then as the horn blew again Major O'Hara came in on Barnegat. The big gray hunter kicked as Paddy Ryan let go of his head. He bucked once, and then as Major O'Hara headed him toward the white wooden wings he settled down to business. He went twice around without a fault. Major O'Hara cleared the last green brush jump by a good foot, and there was a sudden splatter of applause.

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"That's great," Sandy said, and put down his program to clap. "He's sure to win."

Lyb saw the pride in Sig's face, and then as she watched his freckled hand pick nervously at the exhibitor's badge that fluttered at his lapel she began to understand. Sig was afraid, but not of Mliss nor of a fall. He was just scared to death of not keeping up to his father.

Lyb looked over to where more and more cars were filling up the parking spaces around the ring, and her heart suddenly warmed to her own parents. Father cared so little about horse shows that he hadn't even bothered to come, and Mother would have been pleased with Sandy or herself if they had gone into the ring mounted on a jackass. "Time to get ready," Sig said, and he and Sandy headed for the stable.

Paddy Ryan had already gotten Mliss groomed until her sides shone like new satin, but for the first time Lyb saw that Mliss was not up to the other horses. The rest of the animals for that class were already lining up, and they all looked bigger, more capable. Several of them were part thoroughbreds, and one horse had the round firm muscles and the broad intelligent head of a good hunter.

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"It's the Oakley woods that get me," Sig said as he fixed the curb chain. "There's probably a trail through 'em, but how'll I ever find it?"

"Which woods?" Sandy asked, and Lyb looked at him impatiently.

"The Oakley woods," she said. "He told us that already. The Oakley woods, the Gavin's fields, and back into the ring."

"But I didn't hear," Sandy said stupidly. "I wasn't listening, I guess."

"What dif does it make?" Sig asked shortly, and swung the saddle into place as Paddy started to get Tipperary ready for the next class. "It's woods we don't know, anyway."

"But I do know 'em," Sandy insisted. "At least I think so. One day after that mess about Winsome I went for a long walk and the grocery man gave me a lift. I walked through those woods and then came out on an old dried-up river bed. You could go down that like lightning."

"How'd I find it? Waste all my time looking."

"But it's marked," Sandy said. "I marked it, starting from the end of the Anderton's land, with big blazes cut on the trees."

Sig gave a low whistle. Just then his father came

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up to the shed and slid off Barnegat. He took off Barnegat's ribbon, threw a cooler over his back, and handed him over to Paddy.

"All ready, Sig?" he asked, and fastened a round white disk with a black eighty-seven on it into Sig's collar. "I'm afraid you're pretty well outclassed."

Sig said nothing but settled himself deep in the saddle. "Right by the Anderton's," he called to Sandy, "and then follow the marks to the river?"

Sandy nodded. "You can't miss it," he said. "Blazes as big as your hand."

Sig nodded and trotted after the other horses who were lined up to start down the back lane that would take them to the woods. Lyb looked after them, and both Sig and Mliss looked smaller and less experienced than the other riders.

"Ready to mount, Major?" Paddy asked as he led Tipperary out of his stall.

"Bring him over to the gate," Major O'Hara said, and started toward the ring with long, hurried strides. "I'll get on at the last minute. Got to see this class."

Lyb took one long, searching look at the line of parked cars. There was no shabby station wagon, and Lyb realized that Mother was so late she would

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miss Sig's class. Lyb took one more look to be sure, and then she tore after Sandy and Major O'Hara. "There's a hill behind Belknap's stable," the major said. "We ought to see most of it from there."

By the time they reached the hill both Lyb and Sandy were panting. "I hope he finds the trail," Sandy said. "If he once gets that, the rest's easy."

Lyb said nothing, but her heart pumped as though she were riding herself. The horses had begun with a quick hard gallop down the road, and Mliss was left behind already. They reached the woods, and one by one the horses disappeared in the green thickness. "Go right," Sandy breathed. "Go right and you'll find the trail."

Lyb said nothing. Below them the sounds of the horse show went on as before. A few people had climbed up on the tops of cars, and here and there a boy scrambled up in a tree, but most of the people watched another class in the ring.

"The woods will tell the story," Major O'Hara said, but neither Lyb nor Sandy answered. Over the hills they could hear the dull pounding of hoofs, and some of the hoofs belonged to Mliss.

The old river bed came out in a dull gray stretch in the first field beyond the woods. There was a

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steep bank where the river might once have been dammed and then the wide, fertile stretches of the Gavin's field. "He'll go round the bank," Lyb said almost to herself. "He'll go round the bank. He'll have to."

Even as she finished a horseman dashed out of the woods. The horse was a small reddish chestnut, and her rider's legs were too long for her.

"It's Sig!" Lyb shouted.

"He found it!" said Sandy.

Sig cantered steadily over the rough land straight for the bank. For a moment Lyb thought he didn't see it, and then she understood. Sig slowed down a little. There was a sudden cloud of dust as Mliss's head ducked forward. Sig slid all the way down the bank on Mliss's back!

Lyb's heart pounded until her ears hurt. She gripped Sandy's arm with all her strength. The next moment they saw Sig through the cloud of dust that spread out fan-shaped behind him! Just then another rider dashed out of the woods. He slowed up to go around the bank and lost several precious seconds as Sig galloped steadily on over the green field.

"Good work!" The words shot from Major O'Hara's lips. "Good work."

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For the first time it dawned on Lyb that maybe Major O'Hara cared more about Sig than he wanted people to know. She stared up at him and then dashed after Sandy back to the ring. Maybe he did care, but what did it matter now? What did anything matter beside Sig and Mliss?

A big roan horse and a flashy-looking bay passed Sig on the home stretch over the Gavin's field. Another bay, thundering along at a full gallop, caught up with them at the turn and reached the ring just as Sig guided Mliss toward the outside of the circle.

"Why didn't he hurry?" Sandy asked. "Why didn't he hurry?"

Lyb knew the answer. "It isn't a race," she said. "Time only counts a quarter. Way of going counts and the shape you're in."

The attendant next to the flag-draped judges' stand lifted his megaphone. "Walk, please," he called. "Wa-alk, ple-ease."

The riders pulled their horses down to a walk. The flashy bay was flecked with foam and his sides heaved. The big bay who had galloped over the field was excited by his run and refused to walk. He jog-trotted awkwardly as the man on his back tried to pull him down to a walk. At the command "Trot"

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he broke into an uneven canter. "Count them out," Lyb told Sandy. "Count those two out."

It was between Sig and the big, quiet-looking roan that had a head and shoulders like a hunter. The judge called them both into the center of the ring. He looked them over, feeling their legs and chests until Lyb thought she would scream. Finally he sent them out again and then spoke to the attendant. The man lifted his megaphone to his lips. "Now," Sandy said from between thin lips. "Now we'll know."

"Number one hundred and one," the man called. "Number one hundred and one first, number eighty-seven second." The sound echoed against the stables and the shed. The Hardwicks stood dumb.

"Sig didn't win," Lyb said finally, as the man shouted the other awards. "Almost but not quite."

She looked up at Major O'Hara, but he had moved over to the gate where the horses were going out. Lyb saw his tall shoulders above the rest of the crowd, and then as Sig turned Mliss toward his father she grabbed Sandy by the arm and ran to meet him.

Sig's red face looked tired and his bridle hand shook. "I did my best," he said, looking at his father. "And so did Mliss. Her very best."

"You were wonderful!" Lyb said before Major

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O'Hara could speak. "I don't care what anyone says, you were both swell."

Major O'Hara smiled down at her as he reached for Mliss's bridle.

"That's what I think," he said, and for the first time as he looked at his son Lyb saw that his lined, weather-beaten face was both pleased and proud.

Sig slid out of the saddle, and as he patted Mliss's cheek the red rosette fluttered above his hand. "Mliss *was* good," he said. "She was wonderful against all those big horses, but it wasn't quite good enough."

"Oh yes, it was," Major O'Hara said, and instead of hanging the ribbon on Mliss's stall he stuffed it into Sig's pocket. "Mliss was plenty good enough, and so were you. She's yours, Sig," he said. "As long as we've got a place to keep her."

Sig looked at his father and Lyb looked at Sig. Sandy was the first to come to. "But that means forever," he said. "Sig can keep her down at the island when you haven't got room."

For a moment Sig said absolutely nothing. Then as his father hurried off to the next class he looked at Lyb and Sandy. "This is on you," he said, and his face beamed like Spuggy's on Christmas morning.

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“Lyb for suggesting it and Sandy for marking the trail.”

“Oh, that wasn’t anything,” Lyb said, and just then she caught sight of Mother and the twins on the far side of the field. Sandy saw them at the same time and let out a staggering whistle. “Three cheers for the Buttonwood Island Riding Club,” he shouted, and never even noticed the startled people around him. “Spuggy, Spinney, Mother! Sig can keep Mliss for keeps.”

“We saw him!” Spinney shouted back, and her voice was squeaky with excitement. “From the road. He was thlick!”

CHAPTER XIII: THE FLIGHT OF AN ARROW



As the warm sunlight touched Sig's face he woke. He stretched for a moment and tried to remember what had happened that was so wonderful. He saw the red rosette hanging over his mirror and he knew it wasn't just a specially good dream. It was the horse show! Winning the ribbon didn't matter. Sig had won ribbons ever since he'd taken his first in a lead-line class at the age of five. But Mliss. Mliss was his forever and forever. And, more than that, Father was perfectly glad to have her and he was pleased with Sig. Not just a momentary, angry-the-next-minute pleased, but really delighted as he hadn't been for years.

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Sig stretched deliciously in the big bed. Last evening when they had ridden the horses home from the show there had been an entirely new feeling between Father and Paddy Ryan and himself. They weren't just two men and a boy who was apt to do dumb things, the way they had been going over. From now on they were three horsemen and three equals. Sig remembered how his father had watched him swing up on Mliss and then had handed him Barnegat's lead. "You and Mliss can take the big fellow home between you," Father had said, and Sig still squirmed with pleasure at the sound of his voice.

For a minute more Sig lay back in the warm trough in the center of the bed, and suddenly he bounded out onto the cold bare floor. Today was going to be a good day. It couldn't help being good, and Sig didn't want to miss a minute of it. He wanted to talk over every detail of the horse show with the Hardwicks. Sandy wouldn't be there because today he was going off to his uncle's in Lyme, but he and Lyb would go over it all together.

Sig reached the island ahead of Lyb and guided Mliss over the old familiar ford. He looked up at the big buttonwood tree and the barn as he went across. The uprights didn't look any too strong, and he

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wondered if the barn had taken a faint list to the right since the day before yesterday. The barn was going to be important during the next few months. Father would have all the hunters in the stable, and Mliss would have to stay on the island. He unsaddled her and turned her loose, but she stood right beside him and nosed at his pockets for sugar. He pulled out a wilted carrot and gave it to her and then rubbed her soft gray nose. Mliss was his, and the barn was plenty good enough. He and the Hardwicks were going to have the very best fall that anyone had ever had in the whole world!

He looked at his Ingersoll, and then as he heard the far-off whistle of a train he realized that Lyb and the twins had probably gone to see Sandy off at the Oakley station. Sig grinned to himself as he wound up his watch. Sandy hadn't wanted to go a bit. A month ago he'd talked about the Labor Day week end as though it were going to be the best part of the summer, but since he had started riding Winsome everything had changed. The horses and the island were the best part of the summer, and every one of them knew it.

Sig looked to the swamp land where a sudden rush of water had cut through to make the spit of land

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into Buttonwood Island. The hurricane a few years ago had done a lot of harm but it had also made the island. As far as Sig was concerned that was the nicest thing that had happened in the whole state of Connecticut. He was just wondering what to do next when he heard Lyb's voice, and the next minute three Hardwicks came out of the woods onto the bank of the river. Lyb had something dark and heavy over her shoulder, and the twins struggled with what might have been a log of wood between them. "We've got something swell," Spuggy shouted, and a moment later Sig could see that they were carrying big rolls of black tar roofing.

"For the barn," Lyb said as she dropped her roll at Sig's feet. "Isn't it great?"

Sig unrolled a little of it and then looked up just as the twins managed to get their roll across the log without dropping it. The roofing was brand new, and there was loads of it. He knew that the Hardwicks never kept any of their small allowances beyond the middle of the week, and he wondered how they had ever managed.

"It'th ourth," Spinney said as she offered Mliss a mangled handful of grass and buttercups. "Daddy gave it to Lyb for keepth."

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"That's right," Lyb said. "He bought it for the shed, but he isn't going to use it and he gave it to us."

"He said he thought we'd done a thwell job down here," Spinney added, "but I guess he really meant you because you did most of the building."

"Dad thought he'd roof the cow barn with it," Lyb said, "but then he thought he'd rather shingle. He isn't very good at it, but he loves to do it when none of us is around."

Sig gazed at one long strip that Spuggy had unrolled until it ran like a long black carpet over the whole length of the island. "Boy, it's a windfall," he said. "But we're going to need a specially heavy pair of clippers to cut it."

"Brought 'em," Lyb said. She pulled a pair of heavy shears out of her overall pocket and handed them to Sig with a flourish. "And we brought loads of those big flat-topped nails you need too. I'm getting practical in my old age. Even Dad thinks so, and he blames it on the island."

Sig grinned as he pulled out the wooden box in which they kept their tools. The joke of it was that Lyb was right. She really was getting practical, and she hadn't put on an act for—well, not a real act—for weeks. By the time he had found his hammer

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underneath the litter of brushes and currycombs the twins were fighting over whose turn it was to unroll the next roll of roofing. "It's my turn!" Spinney said.

"I thought of it!" Spuggy protested. His lip turned out, and as Spinney reached for the roll he tried to hit her.

"Wish Sandy were here," Sig said. "He's good at settling fights."

Lyb said nothing but grabbed Spuggy's hand and pulled him to the end of the black tar carpet. "It's just as much fun rolling it up again," she said as she kneeled down to get it started. "Once you get it going it rolls by itself."

A few minutes later they were really at work. Lyb did the measuring while Sig shinnied up the tree and let himself onto the top of the barn. A few months ago Lyb would have pretended she was an expert tailor and cut the tar roofing any which way, but now she marked it out exactly with a couple of nails and cut carefully to measure. Sig nailed down the first section and then Lyb handed him another strip. He flipped it over the ridgepole and then moved gingerly after it. The barn wasn't any too steady—there wasn't any doubt of that—but Sig put the unpleasant thought behind him. It would do. It had

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to do, and meanwhile when everything seemed to be falling into Sig's hands he wasn't going to kick because an old abandoned shed that belonged to someone else wasn't the Gavin's stable.

Once the twins tried paddling in the dirty water, and Lyb had to stop cutting to entice them back onto the island. Another time Spinney tried cutting pickerel weed with the shears, but finally they decided they were hungry and started for home. "Don't forget the starving Armenians," Lyb called after them as she picked up her shears. "I think Maggie was making blueberry muffins."

"We'll bring you some," Spuggy called, but Spinney stood first on one bare foot and then the other.

"We might bring you some," she said slowly, "but we can't promith. It's a long, hungry walk to this island."

"I guess that's the last we'll see of them," Sig said as the two little figures disappeared in the woods. Lyb said nothing but straightened up for a minute and gave a loud sigh of relief. Sig went back to hammering in his nails. Sandy wasn't such an awfully good carpenter, but for the first time Sig realized how much he helped by entertaining the twins. When he was along he kept them busy and quiet, but

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without him they were as distracting as a swarm of gadflies.

"Did your father win the hunters' championships?" Lyb asked. "We couldn't stay for the last class."

Sig nodded with some nails between his teeth. "Yes," he said. "I guess it was a pretty big day for the whole family."

The rest of the morning sped along. Between working on the barn and talking about the horse show it was noon before they knew it. When Sig finally let himself down to the ground the roof was already half covered. "It looks swell," Lyb said. "Just as well as if Joe had done it."

"It's fair," Sig said. "And it went awfully quickly. Maybe we could finish this half today, and get it all done, and surprise Sandy when he gets back."

"Good idea," Lyb said, and walked across the log as though she were a tightrope walker. "I'll hurry back as soon as I can."

Sig put away his tools and then reached for Mliss's bridle. "Guess I'll leave her after all," he said. "It'd be quicker than saddling and bridling, and I'll want her down here later." He stopped for a moment to look at a small log that Sandy had begun to hollow

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out for a toy canoe for the twins and then hurried across the log. He looked back and saw Mliss looking after him with her long ears pointing. She watched him for a moment and then went back to cropping the short grass. She'll stay there, he thought proudly as he walked through the woodland trail. She'd stay in an open field or in the middle of traffic until I came back. She's as good as a mounted policeman's horse.

When he came back to the island Lyb was there ahead of him. She handed him a blueberry muffin. "These are great," she said, "and there are lots left for tea. How come you didn't bring Mliss so we could ride up together?"

"Ride up together?" Sig said, and the muffin stayed untasted in his hand. "Ride up together? I didn't take Mliss away at all."

Lyb fastened Sunny's halter to one of the short halter shanks in the barn. "You didn't take her," she said. "Then—Sig—she must have run away."

For one terrible moment Sig couldn't move, and then suddenly he began running around the island. He looked behind the big tree and in the barn, but there was no place that Mliss could be hiding where he couldn't have seen her. "She's gone," he said stupidly. "She really is gone!"

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"She probably ran home," Lyb said. "Maybe she's up in your big barn right this minute."

Sig shook his head as he hunted along the river bank for hoofprints. "Mliss wouldn't!" he said over and over, as though he were trying to convince himself. "She wouldn't go unless maybe a bee stung her or something, and even then she wouldn't go off the island."

Lyb crossed the ford and found some hoofprints on the further side. "Look! Look here! Hoof marks cut deep. As though she were running."

Without another word Sig rushed over the log. He stared at the marks and then went off down the bank with Lyb at his heels. They ran until they were breathless, and then they walked for a few yards and ran again. When they got to the O'Haras' barn they were both breathless and exhausted, but Mliss was not there. "Father! Pat!" Sig shouted, but the only answer was the dull thud of the horses' hoofs and the slow swish of their tails. "Father's out," Sig said desperately. "And so's Pat. I remember they were both going down to Fairbrook."

Lyb led the way back toward the river. "Our best chance is down here," she said. "If Mliss didn't go up to the barn she probably ran straight along the

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river bank. Pretty soon we're sure to find some marks."

Sig couldn't even answer. "Mliss is gone. Mliss is gone." The words repeated over and over in an angry chorus in his mind. "Mliss is gone. And Father said I could keep her *if* I could take care of her."

They left the O'Haras' land and followed the river past the Capuras', and the Risinskis', and several other Polish farms. Once they passed a low muddy spot where Peter Risinski's cows went down to the river, but in the welter of cow and horse tracks they couldn't be certain if any of the hoofprints were Mliss's.

Finally they reached a sharp turn in the river, and the bank which had been green meadow land was suddenly brambly and impassable. "She must have turned here," Sig said, and just then Lyb gave a shout.

"More tracks!" she said. "Up this old cow path. Right up toward that barn."

Sig dropped on his knees. Where the chocolate-brown earth was bare of grass it was easy to see the hoofprints. They were small and sharp, and they might have belonged to Mliss. Sig began to run up the hill with Lyb beside him. Soon they came within

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sight of a shabby cluster of gray farm buildings and a small green house that seemed to have settled right into the grass about it. "I know this place," Lyb panted. "But I never knew it backed up on the river. Old Mrs. Stern lives here that everybody in the village says is crazy."

They ran the rest of the way across a field studded white with yarrow and wild carrot. As they turned the corner by the big hip-roofed barn Sig heard a high, familiar whinny. He started to run again, tripped over a rusty cultivator that had been abandoned in the field, plunged on again, and the next minute he saw Mliss.

"Mliss!" he shouted. "Mliss! Here, girl!"

Mliss's sides heaved. Her neck was wet and white-flecked with sweat, but as she saw Sig her ears lifted and she began to trot toward him. Sig didn't stop running until he was beside her and one hand was through her halter and the other arm around her steaming neck. "Mliss," he said, and now his voice was choky and queer, "you did give us a chase."

A minute later Lyb panted up beside him, and then they both saw Mrs. Stern. The old woman, dressed in shapeless gray clothes, plodded across her muddy yard in a pair of high rubber boots. "Land

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sakes," she said, and put down the pail of water that she had been carrying. "So it's your mare. She ran in here like she was chased by the Old Nick himself. Whatever did you do to get her in such a state?"

Sig said nothing while Lyb answered. His fingers had already found three thick hairy welts on Mliss's chestnut rump. Somebody had turned Mliss loose and then given her three terrific cuts to make her run. Sig was so mad that his heart pounded and he could hardly breathe. He felt her thin legs, her deep heaving chest, but she wasn't hurt anywhere else. He turned to show Lyb the welts, and then he realized that old Mrs. Stern was talking.

"So you're Fred Hardwicke's girl," Mrs. Stern said. "Must have been a right smart chase from way over to your place."

"We didn't come from over there," Lyb said. "We just came from the island."

"Island?" Mrs. Stern lifted up her pail of water again. "Never heard tell of an island round here."

"It's the old point," Lyb explained. "You know, Peckham's Point just south of our place. The river broke through and made an island of it a couple of years ago."

Mrs. Stern looked at them with new interest. "You

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ain't living down at the P'int now, are you?" she said, and then gave a queer, rusty little laugh and shook her head. "Reckon not. Folks ain't lived down at the P'int now for years. Some says it ain't healthy."

She would have turned back into the house, but now Lyb stopped her. "What isn't healthy about it?" she asked. "Why hasn't anybody ever lived down there?"

Mrs. Stern's gray wrinkled face had the listening look of a deaf person who has lived too much alone. "Can't rightly say," she said. "'Tain't the air, certainly. Back in my grandma Hendry's day people wouldn't even walk by the P'int after nightfall."

"But why?" Lyb insisted. "Why did people feel that way about it?"

"Oh, I've heard tell a lot about that spit of land," Mrs. Stern said, and her toneless old voice was so low that Sig could hardly hear her. "They did say there was an Indian chief who hanted the place." She looked up at Sig and Lyb for a minute, and her faded blue eyes brightened. "Why, yes, now, come to think of it, they said he was called Black Feather." She lifted up the pail again and moved on still muttering to herself. "Called him Black Feather, they did, but

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even old Grandpa Hendry never knew a living soul who'd seen him."

Sig and Lyb moved after her, but now the old lady had forgotten them. She opened up her sagging front door and shut it behind her without once looking round.

"Well!" said Lyb when they were quite sure the door would not reopen. "Did you ever hear anything so exciting? If she only hadn't stopped at the best part."

Sig turned back to Mliss. For a moment his attention had been distracted but now, more than anything on earth, he wanted to know who had made those marks on Mliss's side. "Look at these," he said, and rubbed Lyb's fingers over the lumps. "That's why she ran away. Somebody beat her into it."

"But, Sig," Lyb said as she headed back toward the island. "But, Sig, if they did that to Mliss maybe they're doing it right now to Sunny."

They hurried back to the island as fast as they could, but when they got there Sunny was nibbling grass as calmly as ever and hardly even looked up when they led Mliss across. Sig tied Mliss between the two tie ropes in the barn and began sponging her down. She was unhurt except for the welts on her

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back, but Sig still choked with anger. Someone had hurt her, someone had given him the scare of his life. He squeezed out the sponge angrily, and just then Lyb gripped his arm. "Sig!" she said. "Look! That arrow. It wasn't there this morning."

Sig looked where she pointed and saw a long arrow stuck into the center of Sandy's half-finished log canoe.

"Where'd it come from?" he said.

"Somebody stuck it there," Lyb said slowly. "Maybe—maybe the same person who made Mliss run."

Sig pulled at the arrow, and it broke out easily from the rotten wood. The head was made of a white quartz tip like most of the heads in Sandy's collection. It was mounted on a shaft of some light dry wood, and the back was carefully tipped with feathers.

He looked around the island, but it was as quiet and peaceful as ever and there was no sign of where the arrow might have come from. The wind rustled the leaves in the big buttonwood tree, and he looked up quickly at its dark shadowy branches. Stories that an Irish nurse had told him years ago about banshees, leprechauns, and strange unearthly creatures

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flickered through his mind. He tried to shake off his uneasiness and reached back for the arrow. As Lyb handed it to him he noticed for the first time that the feathers were a gleaming purply black. "Lyb," he said, and his teeth chattered as he spoke, "Lyb, what was that Indian chief's name?"

"Black Feather," Lyb said. "Why do you want to know?" Just then her eyes followed his own to the shaft of the arrow. "But, Sig," she said, and suddenly her voice sounded high and frightened, "it couldn't be. It just couldn't be!"

CHAPTER XIV: A BOMBSHELL AND A CAMP



THEY DIDN'T STAY on the island much longer. A twig cracked in the neighboring woods and Lyb jumped. The island was cold and eerie like a familiar room that becomes suddenly frightening in the darkness. "Put the arrow away," Lyb said, and found that she was whispering. Sig put the arrow away in the box

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with the tools and then followed Lyb across the ford. "You could bring Mliss up to our barn for the night," Lyb said. "There's loads of room that hasn't been used since Grandfather Hardwicke had a whole stableful of carriage horses."

"Thanks," Sig said. "I guess I will. At least until we find out who turned her loose."

But try as they might they couldn't find a clue, and for the next fortnight Mliss stayed with Sunny Jim and Potato Pete in the Hardwicks' big old-fashioned stable. That evening, when they suddenly moved Mliss up from the island and Sig lugged over a bag of grain for her to eat, nobody asked them why they had changed plans, and Lyb and Sig never told. At first, when they had just left the island, they rushed into the living room with the story on their lips. Sig began telling what had happened, with Lyb adding and interrupting. "We found Mliss way down toward Millerton," Sig said. "In an old crazy woman's farmyard."

"Old Mrs. Stern's place," Lyb said, and then she saw Father's face. Father's eyebrows had the old question-mark look that meant how much of this is true and how much is just a good story. From that moment on Lyb said nothing. Once Sig looked over

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at her, and then the next minute he ended lamely. "Well, we just brought Mliss back to the island, you see, and then—well, then, pretty soon we came up here."

They looked at each other and both knew how the other felt. Mr. Hardwicke was going to laugh at them and Mrs. Hardwicke was going to worry and perhaps forbid them the island. Either circumstance was to be avoided, and Lyb suddenly began to talk about Sandy's trip to Uncle Rob's. She looked up at Sig as he helped himself to his fourth blueberry muffin. He caught her eye and shrugged his shoulders expressively. Maybe they had been fooled. In this warm, light room where Father sat solidly in his big leather chair and the twins played with blocks under the piano ghosts seemed too absurd. Lyb nodded and put her finger over her lips. Whatever happened, it was safest not to say anything about it.

On Sunday they went over to the Gavin's, and on Monday the Andertons came over and they went off on an all-day picnic. It wasn't until Tuesday, when they were walking up to the store, that they really had a chance to talk it all over again. They had ridden early before breakfast, and then Maggie had asked them to get her some chocolate so she

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could make some Mocha cake, which was Sandy's favorite dessert. "We'll go down to the island as soon as Sandy gets back," Sig said suddenly. "We can't let anybody get away with beating up Mliss."

Lyb nodded, but as they walked into the lonely wood road that led to the village a little of the old creepy feeling came back again. A rolling stone clattered sharply down the bank behind them, and Lyb turned as though she had heard a sudden footstep.

The day was cool and fall-like, and the village store smelled comfortably of warmth, crackers, and freshly ground coffee. Charlie Hughes, the storekeeper, was setting aside some stale loaves of bread while over in one corner, in her cubicle office, Miss Mills, the postmistress, sorted out the mail. Old George Heinrich and two or three other men stood in front of the pot-bellied stove that was lighted for the first time. Lyb said good morning and then bought her bars of unsweetened chocolate while Sig stopped to see if there was any mail. She would have hurried out again, past the tempting confusion of sweet crackers and candy bars, if George Heinrich hadn't stopped her. "I hear that lot down to Black River's been sold," he said. "The parcel of land you and your brother wanted to know about last spring."

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For a moment Lyb said nothing. "Sold?" she said, and was dimly aware that the men about the stove turned to look at her. "Sold? The island sold? Sig, did you hear that?"

Sig stuffed a couple of advertisements into his pockets and his face grew red. "When was it sold? Who bought it?"

George Heinrich moved a chair a comfortable distance from the stove and sat down. "Sold about a week ago. To a man named Clark who's been boarding with me. Mighty nice man, but I kind of wondered why he bought it. 'Tain't worth nothin' for farming or for a house site. Why, all that tract of land was clear under water during the hurricane."

Lyb and Sig waited to hear no more. They stumbled down the front steps of the store, unaware of the crisp cold air that blew on their faces. "So it's sold," Lyb said as they started down the hill toward the Hardwicks'. "And that means an end of using the barn. It means an end of the club."

Sig kicked hard at a rolling stone that lay in his path. "Maybe we can still use it. Maybe Mr. Clark or whatever his name is won't care any more about it than old Miss Peckham."

"Maybe," Lyb said, but it was no use pretending.

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Using abandoned land that belonged to an old lady who lived fifty miles away and who had not been near it for over thirty years was one thing. Using land that had just been bought by someone boarding right in the village was quite another. "Maybe. But there isn't much chance."

Mrs. Hardwicke had gone to town to meet Sandy, and they were both coming out on the afternoon train with Mr. Hardwicke. There was no one for Lyb and Sig to tell but the twins, and they were too young to be any comfort. "You mean we won't be able to play down there any more?" Spuggy said, and then the next minute he dashed off to show Sig how he had learned to climb the apple tree.

They went down to the island after lunch. The grass had straightened up a little where they had worn it down. A few leaves had blown down from the buttonwood tree, but nothing else had changed. The island was as separate and peaceful as ever, and the quiet river still moved along on its dark, continuous passage to the sea. Lyb looked up at the big tree, but now the great black and tan trunk and the full, leafy branches were no longer frightening. They were suddenly precious and dear like the familiar face of someone who is going away never to return.

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"We—we're dopes to go off so much," Sig said, echoing her thoughts. "If we'd stayed around here no one could have driven Mliss away. We were dopes even to miss three days down here."

Lyb nodded and picked up one of the round woody buttons that had fallen off the tree. She straightened out its stem and pulled it carefully through her buttonhole as though it were some sort of a talisman that would bring her back to the island. "Maybe Mr. Clark won't like it," she said. "Maybe the river'll flood again this spring and wash away anything he builds."

Sig said nothing, and in a few minutes they moved gloomily back to the house. Joe was just starting the station wagon, and the twins were arguing over who was to sit in the back seat. "We're going to meet Sandy," Spinney called. "We're going down to Oakley to get Sandy and Mummy and Dad."

"We might as well go too," Lyb said, and she and Sig climbed into the back of the station wagon.

They saw the family standing on the train platform even before the train stopped. Sandy looked tall and brown in the gray flannel suit that he hadn't worn all summer, and Mother and Father looked strange and impersonal in their city clothes. The

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minute that Mother got off the train she saw that something was wrong. "What's happened?" she asked, looking from Lyb's long face to Sig's. "Not the twins? Has anything happened to the twins?"

The next moment Spuggy and Spinney clattered around the ugly yellow station. "We were trying to get some chewing gum," Spuggy said as he gave his mother a hug, "but it wouldn't come out without a penny."

Father hurried them into the station wagon, and in another minute they were driving back to Elm Top. "I had a slick time at Uncle Rob's," Sandy said. "We went off in his boat, and once we went off head-hunting along the river and found a stone knife."

Lyb looked away from his happy, smiling face. "The island's been sold," she said gloomily. "The island and all the marshland around it."

For once Lyb's news had an even more dramatic effect than she wanted. Mother put Spinney down on the seat beside her so that she could look at Lyb, Sandy dropped his new book, and Father looked back over his shoulder from the front seat. "Sold?" he said. "To whom?"

"To a man named Clark," Sig said. "Andrew

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Clark who's been boarding with Heinrich up in the village."

"It's a mighty poor section of land to buy; can't see any earthly use to it," Joe said as he steered the car around the corner.

Nobody listened to him, for now they all turned to Sandy. "I know Mr. Clark," he said suddenly. "I met him once when I went for a walk down to the Pocono bridge."

"You know him?" Lyb said as though Sandy had claimed friendship with the villain in a movie. "You know him? Is he horrible?"

"No," Sandy said. "At least I don't think so. He seemed very nice."

Lyb said nothing but the corners of her lips turned down. He couldn't be nice, she thought. No one who had bought that island and was taking it away from them could ever be nice.

It was almost dark by the time they reached Elm Top, so they couldn't go to the island until the next morning. But Sig came over early, and they started down the hill while the dew was still heavy and the cobwebs glistened on the wet grass. Lyb said nothing as the three of them moved silently toward the ridge that led to the island. The evening before had been

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dull and dispiriting. Even Sandy's accounts of his trip sounded half-hearted, and nobody was really interested until Father had opened up the local evening paper and begun to read an account of the sale.

"Five-acre property formerly known as Peckham's Point recently sold to Professor Andrew Clark of Amherst College," Father read, and Lyb went to look over his shoulder. "Mr. Clark is away at present," she read down at the bottom of the notice, "but is expected to take possession of his new property on his return at the end of next week. The land is part timbered and part swamp land bounded in part by the estates of Frederick Hardwicke, Quentin O'Hara, and the Black River."

A few minutes later Father put away the paper and went off in the car to see someone up in the village. For once Lyb wasn't even curious enough to ask where he was going, and a few minutes later she and Sandy went dejectedly to bed. "It's hard luck," Mother said when she came into Lyb's room to open the windows. "It's awfully hard luck when you worked so hard on the barn, but perhaps something else will turn up. You might even find a better place near the pool."

Lyb turned her face away into the pillow. Some-

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times grown people, even wonderful ones like Mother, were incredibly dense. Find another place nearer the pool! Mother acted as though one of Spuggy's castles in the sand box had fallen down and she could comfort him by telling him to build another. Lyb snorted out loud as Mother's light step echoed down the hallway.

Find another place indeed! What other spot in all that hilly countryside was so hidden and so private? What other place could make you feel like an island queen on her water-bound domain? Where else could Sandy daydream so well, and where, where else could Sig feel safe and free as he never did at home? Lyb felt the aching sobs rise in her throat. She burrowed her head further down into the pillow until the image of the island rose out of the blackness. She could almost see the big buttonwood tree and the battered gray barn. Find another place like Buttonwood Island? There wasn't one in the whole of Connecticut and probably not in the world.

The next morning when Sig joined the Hardwicks it was clear that he was just as depressed as they were. "It's nice of your family to let me keep Mliss over here," he said as he set down the extra bag of oats he had brought over for Mliss to eat. "Perhaps

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next summer Father'll have more room at home."

Lyb looked at him and tried to think of something to say. It was really harder on Sig than on any of them. Elm Top was three times as far from him as the island, and it meant that he could only see Mliss when he came over to visit. It wouldn't be the same, but then nothing would be the same without Buttonwood Island.

Once as they walked through the woods Sandy started to whistle, but in a moment he stopped and the sound dwindled away in a dreary little echo. Lyb gave a sigh and followed along after Sandy's hunched shoulders. It was worse even than the threat of losing Mliss. Then only Sig had been hurt and the others could rally round to help him. But now the island, which seemed the beginning and the end of their fun together, was being taken away, and they were all hurt.

They came out of the woods, and with one accord they stood for a moment on the river bank and looked across at the island. It looked lovelier and more jewel-like than ever set in the slanting sunlight. The great dominating buttonwood seemed bigger and more majestic, and even the shabby barn looked homelike and dear.

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Lyb's eyes moved from the lookout rock which they had lined with hay to the path they had worn down the middle of the island. She saw the old cellar, their fireplace, the ford, and the homemade hitching post where they had tied their horses. It was all so familiar and precious that Lyb wondered how they had ever gotten through summers without it. She looked over to where Sig and Sandy stood side by side near the log on which they had first crossed, and then she knew for certain that no summer had ever been like this one anyway. First of all there had been the series of governesses, and she and Sandy hadn't had much more freedom than the twins. Then there hadn't been Sig, nor the horses, nor, above all, the island.

Lyb followed the boys across the log. "Next summer I just won't stay here," she said. "Maybe the family will send me to camp."

"Camp'd be deadly," Sig said. "Just tennis and swimming with a lot of screaming girls."

Lyb nodded and knew that Sig was right. Camp would be deadly, but so, for that matter, would Elm Top be deadly when the island belonged to somebody else.

It wasn't until they stood around the blackened

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stones of their fireplace that Lyb thought of the arrow. "Where is it?" she asked, and Sig rummaged around in the tool box to find it.

"Did you tell Sandy about it?" he asked, and Lyb shook her head. With the bombshell news of the place's sale the arrow had completely faded from her mind. Now, as she took it from Sig and handed it over to Sandy, she wondered how she had forgotten it.

"It was awfully funny," she said when Sig had finished telling about Mliss's disappearance and their tantalizing talk with Mrs. Stern. "First that tramp told us about Black Feather, and then Mrs. Stern, and then we find this!"

Sandy turned the arrow over and weighed it carefully in his hand. "It's a fair job," he said finally. "The tip's real and the shaft's a pretty good imitation."

"Imitation?" Lyb said. "Fair? What do you mean?"

Sandy looked at them and his thin face was scornful. "Maybe nobody can make an arrow exactly the way the Indians did," he answered, "but you'd think anybody would know enough not to use a store thong."

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"Store thong?" Sig said, and then Sandy showed them that the leather thong that bound on the arrow was square cut. "This couldn't have been made except in a factory," he said. "Probably somebody bought it up at the store and then stuck the arrow together."

For the first time in days Lyb wanted to laugh. She looked at Sig bending over Sandy's shoulder, and suddenly she howled until the tears rolled down her cheeks and she had to lean against the big tree. For a minute Sig looked sheepish. He caught Lyb's eye, and then he too laughed until he cried.

Sandy looked at both of them and his face was bewildered. "What's so awfully funny?" he asked. "What's the big joke about, anyhow?"

Lyb choked and gasped and tried to explain, and then the wave caught her again and she doubled up with laughter. Sig had been afraid and she had been afraid. So deadly terrified that they hadn't even wanted to come back to the island; and now Sandy, small, timid Sandy, made them both look like a pair of half-wits. "So it was all a joke," she got out finally. "Just a kind of a joke. Before Halloween."

For a minute more Sig could do nothing but laugh, and then finally he was sober. "Well, whoever

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it was gave Mliss three awful cuts," he said, "and that isn't so darn funny."

"What did they do it for?" Sandy said, and he turned the arrow over and over as though that might hold the answer. "And who did it, anyhow?"

Lyb straightened up, and she no longer felt at all like laughing. They had only a little time more on the island, and somebody or other was trying to scare them off on their last free days. "Who could it be?" she said. "Some fresh kid up in the village?"

Sandy shook his head. "Couldn't be," he said. "At least I don't think so. Whoever made that arrow didn't just make it for fun, and they knew something about what they were doing."

"Who was it, then?" Lyb said, and as she looked at Sig she knew the answer even before he spoke.

"It's that man Akeley!" Sig said, jumping up from the ground. "It must be Akeley. Nobody else except the family had any idea how much we used the place."

"D'you suppose it could be Akeley?" Sandy said, and then suddenly his voice grew as excited as Sig's. "Of course it could be! He was the one who told us about Black Feather in the first place. And he kept asking us about any Indian finds, and I know, I just know, he saw me pick up that gorget."





"Well, whoever it was gave Mliss three awful cuts."

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"But why did he turn Mliss loose?" Sig asked.

"To get us off!" Lyb said as she sprang up beside Sandy. "To get us off the island because he wanted to come on!"

"But why did he?" Sig insisted.

Lyb started to say something, but now Sandy was walking up and down, looking at the island as though he'd never seen it before. "Where would you camp," he said suddenly, turning to the others, "where would you camp if you'd never been in this place before in your life?"

For a minute Lyb didn't understand. What in the world was Sandy driving at? He had dropped the arrow, and now he ran around the island like Sambo after a rabbit. "Where would you camp?" he asked Sig again. "Uncle Rob told me that was the very best way to find an Indian site. Look for the place you'd pick if you were making a camp yourself."

"Why, I'd camp over there," Lyb said, pointing to where they had built their fireplace in the midst of the old cellar. "It'd be easy to make a fire against the cellar wall."

"But suppose the cellar wasn't there," Sandy said. "Suppose nothing was here but the buttonwood tree."

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"By the river," Sig said. "Right over there where I could look at the mainland."

"But the river didn't go through there then. It only went over there on the south side until the year after the hurricane. If the river only ran on the south side, where would you camp?"

Both Lyb and Sig were mystified. "You'd choose some high ground, wouldn't you?" Sandy asked them, and they both nodded, looking about the island.

"I guess I'd camp right in the barn," Sig said. "I mean what's in the barn now."

Sandy's pale face was red with excitement. His hand shook as he flung open the barn door. "That's just the place the Indians would pick," he said. "I never thought of it until Uncle Rob told me about picking out a camp site. Even then I forgot about the river being different. If there's anything anywhere, it would be right here."

Sig reached for the stable shovel and began to dig. "Whatever's here," he said, "we're going to find it!"

Lyb reached uncertainly for the hoe they had used when they first cleaned up the island. It sounded absurd. Just another of Sandy's crazy daydreams about his old Indians. She began listlessly to move

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a little of the dark trampled earth that floored the barn. Suddenly Sandy dropped on his knees, and the next moment he let out a shout. "Pecking stones!" he said. "Two of 'em!"

"What are they?" Lyb asked. "What are they? What do they mean?" She picked up the stones that Sandy handed her, but they meant nothing. They were only round smooth stones, slightly chipped at one end. "What good are they?" Lyb said, but now Sandy was so excited he could hardly answer.

"They're pecking stones!" he said again. "Real Indian pecking stones. The kind they used to peck out their arrowheads from a piece of quartz or flint."

Sig dropped on his knees to look at the stones. "What good are they?" he asked. "Are they valuable?"

Sandy shook his head. "Not a bit," he said. "Except as markers to show you where they had a camp site."

"Was there one here?" Lyb asked, and now she began to dig as furiously as Sig.

"Yes!" Sandy said. "At least I think so; and what do you bet that's what Akeley was after?"

CHAPTER XV: LIGHT IN THE RAIN



THEY DUG all that morning, but it was hard going through the packed earth. They had brought their lunch with them, but for once they didn't bother to build a fire and just ate their sandwiches and drank their ginger ale in the shade of the buttonwood without bothering to fry any bacon. As soon as they could they started to dig again. By midafternoon they had a big circle where they had gone through the dark surface earth and had come upon a streak

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of light-colored clay. For a long time they made no finds, and then Sig leaned over his shovel and picked up a couple of reddish-looking stones. "Are these anything?" he asked. "They aren't even scratched at the end."

Sandy looked at them and then flew back to his digging. "Pot boilers," he said. "At least I think so. They heated stones like that and then they dropped 'em into water to make it hot."

For a moment Lyb didn't believe him. Then her hoe grated against something hard, and the next moment as she turned over the dirt she saw black charcoal streaks running through the yellow clay. "Charcoal," she said. "Burnt wood. So they did have a fire here."

From then on they dug slowly and carefully around the place where she had found the charcoal. They were about six inches below the surface, and the dark earth was piled up in low mounds against the barn wall. Lyb dug again, and this time she brought up some small white chips of quartz. She studied them with a new interest. For the first time every stone had a meaning and a story behind it. "Chips!" she said, and put them out on Sandy's jacket. "And look!" She picked up a small white

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object that was half buried in the dirt and brushed it clean. It was a small, perfectly turned quartz arrowhead. She put it down and began digging with her hands. She found another, and then another, and finally a flint point with a long tapering end. "Is that an arrow?" she asked, but Sandy shook his head.

"It's a drill," he said. "I've seen 'em in museums, but I've never found one before."

Lyb went back at the earth with trembling hands. For the first time she understood a little of Sandy's excitement. It was like fishing. You put your line over in a likely place. At first you weren't sure of catching anything, and then as you brought first one and then another fish into the bottom of the boat you knew you weren't going to be left, and then finally you knew you were really making a haul. Sig picked up a sharp triangular-shaped arrowhead without any grooved end to it, and a moment later Sandy found one like it. "War points," he said. "For fighting. Those others were for game."

They found several more heads and a sharp half semicircle of stone. It looked like a small new moon carved out of flint. Sandy cleaned it off with his handkerchief, and the gray flint glistened in the

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afternoon light. "A knife," he said, "and boy, what a beauty!"

They began marking off the space in back of the line of charcoal and dug it up carefully with a trowel. They found several flint heads and two more quartz ones, and then suddenly Sandy gave a little yelp that sounded like an excited terrier. "Pink," he said. "Rose quartz. Look at it."

It was getting dark in the barn, and they took it outside. Sandy handed the head over to Lyb, and she turned it over carefully in her fingers. It was quite light, cool and clean to the touch, and a lovely clear pink in color.

"How'd they ever make it," Sig said, "without knives or anything?"

"Just by chipping," Sandy said, and slipped the head into his pocket. "But it's the very best piece I ever saw."

It had turned quite dark and cold. A few of the leaves from the buttonwood blew off in a sudden gust of wind. Lyb shivered and looked at the horses who had crowded close together on the picket line. "It's going to rain," she said. "And maybe there's going to be a storm."

Sandy said nothing but went back to his digging,

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and in a few moments Sig and Lyb followed him. As Lyb looked at the growing pile of flint and quartz on Sandy's jacket she felt more and more uncomfortable about their not telling Mr. Clark. Once she said something to Sig and Sandy. Sig only shrugged his shoulders. "We aren't going to take the stuff," he said. "We'll just dig it up and then turn it over to him."

A moment later Lyb found a piece of broken pottery, and from then on she stopped listening to her conscience. The pottery was the lower half of a bowl, carefully marked with little wavelike stripes. "Maybe they used it to mix corn meal in," Sandy said. "Or perhaps to get water."

Lyb nodded, and in her mind's eye she saw a long-dead Indian princess, dressed in a light deer-skin robe, dipping water out of the Black River. She would have gone on digging and daydreaming indefinitely if Sig had not pulled out his big Ingersoll watch. "Six o'clock!" he gasped. "And Father's home for supper."

He bridled Mliss and lifted up her saddle. "I've got to beat it," he said, "but I'll be back right after supper."

Sandy would have gone right on digging, but Lyb

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urged him to stop. Mother was no longer cross when they were late, but there was no point in being late when you didn't have to be. "If we went up to the house we could get a light," Lyb coaxed. "And then we can dig when it's really dark."

The thought of the lamps did the trick, and Sandy finally consented to ride Potato Pete up to the house. But by the time they got there the twins were already in bed and Mr. and Mrs. Hardwicke had gone out for supper. For once Lyb was glad that they were away. Of course there was nothing really wrong with their digging, but she was just as pleased not to talk it over with Mother and Father. Father might make fun of us, Lyb thought defensively; but it wasn't just Father that she wanted to escape. It was Mother who never made fun but just looked at you with clear, steady eyes that were wilting if you'd done anything wrong. But we haven't, Lyb said to herself, and threw up her head.

They went into the kitchen where Maggie had left their supper. They gulped down the hot soup and ate the tomato and ham sandwiches as fast as they could.

Maggie came down before they had finished, and as she looked at them her old face wrinkled with

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disgust. "Sure, you're as black as Spuggy himself," she said. "Couldn't you even wash once after your parents were out?"

For a fraction of a moment Lyb was annoyed, but she knew Maggie was right and she laughed and washed out her cup and saucer at the kitchen sink. "Oh, Maggie, it was just like a picnic," she said. "Sandwiches and everything, and we just acted as though we were out of doors."

"Sure, you brought most of it inside with you!" Maggie said, and began to sweep the caked dirt from the linoleum floor. "You're more trouble than a dozen pair of twins."

Lyb and Sandy started out of the kitchen, but not before Maggie called after them. "Be back at nine o'clock, now; your mother said she'd be home early."

"Where'd they go?" Sandy asked. "They don't usually go out in the middle of the week."

"To the Gavin's, I think it was, and then they were stopping in the village to see a Mr. Clark."

"Mr. Clark!" Lyb said as the brown kitchen door swung shut. "Mr. Clark. Then he's back again."

She looked at Sandy, but he was already running through the long hall. "Come on. Hurry," he called

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over his shoulder. "If he's back, then tonight's our last chance to dig."

Lyb stopped at the hall closet to find the flash lights. She dug through a pile of tennis rackets, sand toys, and baseball gloves, and finally she found them. She hurried up to the barn with one electric lantern over her left arm and the other in her hand. Sunny shied as she came toward him, and for a moment she thought of walking. The next minute she set the lanterns down on the seat of the farm wagon and began putting on Sunny's bridle. By the time she was finished Sunny was more used to the light. She got up on his back, reached for the lanterns, and headed out of the stable. "We're off," she called, and just then Sandy came clumping up beside her.

Sig reached the island a few minutes after the Hardwicks had begun digging. "Any more finds?" he asked, but Sandy only shook his head and dug his shovel in a little further away from their first hole.

They dug for several more minutes, and then when they got to the level of the light clay they once more began to come upon chips and heads. "It was a camp, all right," Sandy said as he sifted the earth with careful hands. "And this must have been where

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the arrow maker sat." He picked up two more arrows and put them on Sig's big handkerchief which they had spread out on the barn floor. It was growing dark, and they hung the lanterns up on the old beams and worked on as their dark shadows spread and lengthened on the gray walls.

Sig began digging a little way back from the other two. His shovel crunched against something hard; he leaned down and then shot up as though he'd stepped on a snake. "It's a skull!" he got out, and Lyb and Sandy crowded round him.

They leaned over, and now Lyb saw the gaping eyeholes and the grinning mouth. "Golly!" she breathed, and would have moved it with the point of her shovel if Sandy hadn't pulled her back.

"Don't touch it," he said. "Don't move it another inch. We've got to leave it for Mr. Clark."

Lyb was glad enough to move back to the yellow light of the lanterns. Somehow that empty, grinning skull was thoroughly terrifying. She looked up at Sig and saw that he was uneasy too. She turned to Sandy, but he wasn't frightened at all, only so thrilled and excited that he could hardly speak. He ran his fingers through his hair, and it stood up straight like a cockscomb. "W-w-we've got to





"It's a skull!" Sig got out, and Lyb and Sandy crowded round him

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l-l-leave it," he stammered. "This isn't like the ch-chips and a few arrows. There might be beads, or pottery, or anything, and we've got to tell Mr. Clark."

Just as he finished speaking they heard the sudden spatter of rain like so much gravel on the roof.

"We'll have to bring in the horses," Sig said, and dashed out to the picket line that they had made between the hitching post and the buttonwood tree.

As Lyb followed him out she realized for the first time that they were in for a storm. The wind bel-lowed through the trees like a roaring sea. Branches snapped off in the gale, and a handful of leaves and twigs beat against Lyb's face like hail.

"Look at the river!" Sandy gasped as a sudden brilliant crack of lightning lighted up the island and the dark circle of woods. Lyb saw that the river had already risen against the high banks and that it was running with the roaring power of a mountain stream.

"We've got to get the horses over soon!" Sig shouted as he struggled to bring Mliss within the shelter of the barn. "It's a regular hurricane."

They had hardly gotten the frightened horses inside the barn before they realized that there was

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no safety there. The old beams groaned like something alive. A window blew open with a sudden splintering of glass, and they could feel the lift of the wind against the old walls. "We've got to beat it!" Sig shouted. "The barn's going."

Lyb took one quick look at the mounds of earth, the grinning skull, and their little heap of finds. There was no time to pack up anything. She reached for the lanterns and ran outside with them and then turned to pull open the barn door. It took all her strength to pull it open against the wind. For a moment it held and then, as the wind caught it, cracked ominously on its hinges and battered against the side of the barn. "Let it go!" Sig yelled as he tried to coax Mliss toward the doorway. "We'll need both hands to manage the horses."

It was one thing to get the horses into the barn and quite another to get them out again. Mliss reared suddenly, and her front feet shot down dangerously close to Sig's chest. Sunny's ears were back and his eyes rolled murderously, but Lyb had no time to be afraid. She pulled at his bridle and at the same moment slapped him hard behind the saddle. The wet hair stuck to her hand, but still Sunny didn't move. She beat at him helplessly, and

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then, as a sudden burst of wind shook the barn like a foundering ship, he bolted through the door.

Somehow Lyb managed to hold onto him. He pulled her halfway across the island and then stood stubbornly close to Mliss's side. Lyb looked back over her shoulder and saw that Sandy had gotten Pete through the doorway. The next moment, as the frightened horses cowered together, there was a bright, haggard streak of lightning and a terrific clap of thunder. "That was close!" Sandy shouted. "In the woods."

Each moment the wind grew stronger. Suddenly there was a terrific groaning creak, a splatter of broken wood, and the side of the barn crumbled like an eggshell.

"We've got to get off," Sandy yelled, and Lyb nodded as she fought to keep her grip on Sunny's slippery bridle.

"We've got to go together," Sig shouted, and his voice sounded faint against the storm. "It's our only chance of getting them into the river."

They moved slowly toward the rushing water. Once Sunny balked. Another time Pete threw his head so that Sandy was jerked clear off his feet, but somehow they managed. They reached the bank

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and looked down at the black water whirling past their feet. For a moment the wind slackened as though it had spent itself in the destruction of the barn, but the rain still poured down unmercifully.

It was impossible to keep the lanterns straight and hold onto the horses, and they moved forward with only fitful flashes of light to see by. "Now!" Sig said from somewhere in the darkness. "One, two, three!"

Lyb felt the water surge over her socks and run eddying past her knees. "If I slip now," she thought, "and Sunny tramples on me!"

She heard Sandy yell, and the next minute, as Pete bolted, all three horses crossed the river in a rush. Lyb bit her wet lips and held on with all her might. Once she was lifted off her feet. Another time, as Sunny charged up the further bank, his hoof caught the side of her loose sneaker and ground it into the mud. As he moved she jerked herself free and he pulled her up the bank.

"Whoa, Sunny," Lyb pleaded, and pulled with both hands on the bridle. "Whoa, boy. You can't run!"

By the time they were all up on the river bank the storm had really abated, but the rain still poured

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down on them so that their hair was matted and their clothes were drenched through. "We can't go through the woods," Sig said as he held Pete while Sandy got on. "We'll have to go along the bank and through our place."

Lyb nodded and pushed the wet hair out of her eyes. Sig held her horse. Once she was on, he gathered his reins carefully and then slid onto Mliss's back as she tried to run. A few minutes later they had their horses under control, and Lyb took a deep breath. The worst was over. The horses still fought for their heads, but they managed to hold them down to a trot. In a few minutes they were on the dirt road, and in another few minutes Lyb knew they would be home.

They were on the straight stretch of road between Elm Top and Major O'Hara's when they saw a moving light. "What is it?" Sandy said, and then the next moment, as they drew nearer, they saw the glisten of a man's raincoat through the glancing rain.

They reined in their horses, and at the same moment the light stopped. For a moment the man held up the light as though he were looking for a path through the woods. Lyb saw a man's white face

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and battered felt hat. "It's Akeley," Sig said, and Lyb's heart pounded faster and faster.

They could no longer hold in their horses, and in a moment they reached the place where the man had disappeared. Lyb brushed her head against her arm and tried to look into the woods. She saw the flicker of the lantern like a glowworm in the woods, and then the next moment it was gone. "It's Akeley!" Sig said again, as he fought to keep Mliss back with the others. "Heading straight for the island."

A few minutes later they reached the barn. Joe had left on the big flood light in the center of the stable, and it seemed suddenly more warm and secure than ever before. Lyb got off Sunny and stretched her cramped legs. She took deep, satisfying breaths of the warm air that smelled of horses, and cows, and good rich feed. "Whew!" she said. "What a night."

Sandy slid off Pete's back, and now he stood facing Lyb and Sig. "Akeley's gone straight to the island," he said. "We've got to tell Mr. Clark."

"We'll telephone," Lyb said, but Sandy shook his head stubbornly.

"It won't work," he said. "It never does in a storm. Last month it didn't work for a week."

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For a moment Lyb hesitated. She was wet and so cold that her teeth chattered, but now that she was in the lighted barn she was no longer afraid. "We'll just have to go up and tell him, then," she said. "We could gallop up the hill in no time."

"Mliss and I could go faster alone," Sig said, and Lyb knew it was true. Sig had been fighting to keep Mliss back with the other horses all the way from the river. For a moment Lyb struggled with herself. She wanted to go, to tell Mr. Clark like a girl Revere on horseback, but it didn't make sense. The sensible thing to do was to let Sig go alone while they put away their horses and got down to the house before Father and Mother came home. For a minute longer Lyb hesitated and then she nodded. "All right, you go," she said.

Sig wiped off his face on a clean stable rubber, and a moment later he was off. The stable seemed suddenly empty and lonely without him. "I hope Mr. Clark goes right down to the island," Lyb said.

Sandy hung up his saddle before he answered. "I guess we should have told Mother or Father as soon as we found those chips," he said. "But I never thought we'd find a burial place. Nobody's ever found one nearer here than New Milford."

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A few minutes later they were ready to go down the hill to the house. They were both cold and wet, and Lyb's teeth chattered. She thought of Sig cantering up the lonely hill to the village, and she knew that she would have hated to go all by herself on a horse that was crazy at any moment to bolt for home. Sig's got nerve, she thought as Sandy pulled open the big front door, and Sandy has too. It's just that they've got nerve about different things.

When they got into the house there was a light in the wide front hall but it was very quiet, and they knew the family weren't home. "We'd better change," Sandy said, and Lyb followed his watery footprints up the polished stairs.

They got into their night clothes and warm wrappers and then they went downstairs again. The house seemed quieter than ever, and each tick of the big grandfather clock sounded loud and clear. "I wish Sig would come," Sandy said, and Lyb nodded while she tried to see through the rainy window-pane.

They waited for what seemed like hours while the clock ticked off fifteen minutes. Finally they heard the noise of a car, and the next minute they saw the

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flash of headlights as it turned into the circle in front of the house.

"It's Mother," Lyb said, and the next minute Mrs. Hardwicke ran up the front steps alone.

She looked at Lyb and Sandy without speaking and then hurried across the hall. "Where's Sig?" Lyb asked.

"Up at the barn. I followed him down in the car."

The next moment they heard her telephone to Major O'Hara. Her voice was very low, and they could hardly hear what she said. "Sig's all right. Yes, perfectly. He's soaked through, and we thought he'd better spend the night. Yes, exactly. Yes. Yes, I think so too."

The next minute Sig came in the front door. He was wetter than ever, and his lips looked blue with cold. "I got him," he said. "And he went down to the island with the state trooper."

Lyb would have asked a dozen questions, but now Mother came out of the closet. "Take Sig upstairs," she said, and her voice had the short sharp note that it hadn't had for weeks. "And get him into some dry clothes."

Sandy did as he was told while Lyb followed Mother into the living room. Mother turned on the

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lights and lit the fire without a word. She picked up a book, put it down again, and then walked toward the long window and tried to look out. "Where's Father?" Lyb said, but even before Mother answered she knew what she was going to say.

"Father's down at the island," she said, "helping the others catch that man."

Lyb stood beside her, but she could see nothing except the drops of water running down the window-pane and the darkness outside. She looked up at her mother, but her mother's lips were tight and unrevealing. Mother's terrified, Lyb thought miserably. She's scared stiff Father's going to be hurt.

The boys came downstairs, and Mrs. Hardwicke pulled herself away from the window. "You look frozen," she said. "I'm going to make you a hot drink."

Lyb caught her halfway to the kitchen. "Let me make it," she said. "Please let me make it."

"You go back in front of the fire," Mrs. Hardwicke said. "I want to make it. I want to do something."

Lyb went back in front of the fire and stood beside the boys. "They'll get him easily," Sig said once, and Sandy nodded. The rest of the time they just stood

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there while the tick of the clock sounded louder and louder.

You ought to be able to make up a poem about this, Lyb thought, but she couldn't even begin. It was exciting, all right, but it certainly wasn't fun. Nothing could be fun when Mother was so tense and white and the house was so dreadfully still. Lyb pulled and pulled at her double-jointed finger. It's our fault, she thought, it's our fault we didn't tell them about the things on the island sooner, and it's my fault most of all.

A moment later Mrs. Hardwicke came in with a tray. She put it down, and the children drank the steaming cocoa while she hurried back to the window. Father'll be all right, Lyb thought while she warmed her cold hands around her cup. He's just got to be.

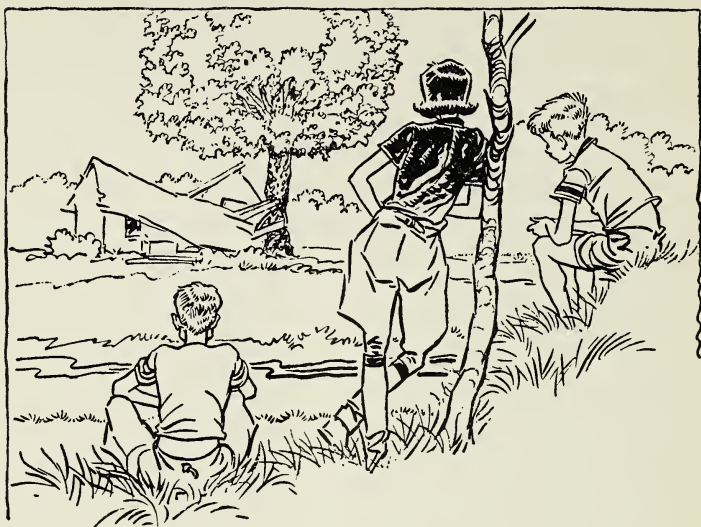
She put back the cup, and just then Mother gave a little cry. "He's here!" she said, and the next instant there was a gust of cold air as Father opened the door. Mother was in the hall almost before the others understood. "Oh, Fred!" she said. "Fred, are you all right?"

The children streamed into the hall, and there was Father with Mother's arms around his wet

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neck. He looked at them over her shoulder, and his dripping face was wonderfully cheerful. "Well, we got your friend Akeley," he said, "and Clark and Sergeant Walker are taking him to Millerton right this minute."

CHAPTER XVI: AFTER THE STORM



THE NEXT MORNING when Lyb got down to the dining room Father and Mother had left; and Sig and Sandy were just finishing their breakfast. "What happened?" Lyb asked even before she had helped herself to food. "What did Father say about the Indian things?"

Sandy shook his head, and his eyes looked red and runny from the cold he had caught the night before.

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"He'd left when we got down," he said. "But he's coming home for lunch."

Sig stood up in Sandy's clothes that were much too small for him. "Your mother's up in the garden," he said. "She went out just when I came down."

Lyb pushed away a plate of ham and eggs without even tasting them. Sooner or later they would have to explain why they hadn't told Mr. Clark the moment they knew there were any Indian finds on the island. She had wanted to talk about it last night, but as soon as Father had told them that Akeley was caught he had sent them off to bed. "You'll have to tell Mr. Clark yourselves," he had said, and they hadn't been able to get another word out of him.

A little while later they went up to the garden. Mother was pulling weeds out of the loose, soaked earth. She straightened up as they came near her, and Lyb and Sandy gave her a kiss.

"Mr. Clark called up while you were still asleep," she said. "He wants you all to meet him at the island at eleven o'clock."

"Did he sound furious?" Lyb said. "What does Father think?"

"You can ask him yourself at lunch time," Mrs. Hardwicke said, and went back to her weeding.

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They hung over the garden fence for a moment, and nobody said anything. Mrs. Hardwicke seemed to be absorbed with her work. She pulled out the weeds and threw them into an old wicker basket without even looking toward the fence. "Why can't she say something?" Lyb thought desperately. "Why can't she say she doesn't blame us for digging?"

Just then Joe came up with a trowel in his hand, and Mother went off to show him where to transplant the asters. Sandy was the first one to move away from the fence. "Well, that's that," he said, and pulled the rose-quartz arrowhead out of his pocket. "I guess we'll just have to go down and face the music."

The time dragged slowly toward eleven o'clock. They went up to the barn to groom the horses, but their best brush and currycomb were down at the island. "We should have taken our stuff away yesterday," Lyb said gloomily. "Or even earlier, as soon as we knew about Mr. Clark."

They walked around Elm Top to pass the time, and Lyb realized all over again just how flat it would seem without the island. When they came to the top of Indian Ridge Sandy looked down toward the river lands and sighed. "Best head-hunting's always

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been along the river," he said. "Maybe Mr. Clark'll get interested in it now he's got that big find."

"Anyone would," Sig said gloomily. "Finding a whole camp site's not like finding just one head."

Lyb whipped off the top of a wild carrot and said nothing. If only Mr. Gavin had bought the island, or Major O'Hara, or someone they knew! They walked back to the barn and up to the sand box where the twins were pulling the struggling kitten into one of Spinney's doll's dresses. "Are you going to the island?" Spuggy said as he rushed to meet them. "Can we go?"

"We won't ever be able to go to the island again," Sandy said. "Not after today."

It was just a quarter of eleven, and as the last ring of the stable clock died away they started toward the island. "If you're going now, we're going," Spuggy said, and Spinney slipped her hand into Sandy's.

"Pleathe, Sandy," she said, and he looked over at Lyb and shrugged his shoulders.

"Might as well let 'em," he said. "It's probably our last visit anyway."

They walked along the gray stone wall without speaking. The bending goldenrod and the henna-

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topped sumac looked new and clean after the rain, and the fields were greener than ever. As they came nearer the island there were more and more signs of the storm. Big branches blocked their path in the woods, and at the corner of the rocky field a big horse-chestnut had been split in two. "That must have been that terrific crack we heard," Sig said.

"I wonder if the log bridge is still there?" Lyb asked. "The water could have carried that away easily."

But when they reached the island the log was still there. The water had rolled it halfway over, and then it had stuck fast between two rocks.

It's better than ever, Lyb thought, and now it doesn't matter. If Mr. Clark really uses this place he'll have to build a real bridge anyhow. She stepped onto the island, and then she saw a tall elderly man that she knew must be Mr. Clark.

"What a storm!" he said when he had shaken hands all round. "Lucky the whole barn didn't cave in."

It was bad enough as it was, Lyb decided. One whole side had crumbled and the wet earth was littered with kindling. There was a sagging hole in the roof, and long ragged streamers of roofing

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hung down on one side. Altogether it looked as hopeless and derelict as a beached ship.

They stood for a moment in an awkward silence, and then Sandy pulled the rose-quartz point out of his pocket. "I found this arrow," he said slowly. "I meant to leave it with the others, but we left in such a hurry."

Now we're in for it, Lyb thought, and Sig unconsciously braced his shoulders. Mr. Clark only looked down at the head, and when he spoke his voice was still friendly. "What a beauty," he said, and led the way into the remains of the barn.

It looked even more wrecked and war torn than it had last night. Akeley had apparently done a good deal of digging and had opened up what looked like more graves. Mr. Clark had spread out a big canvas, and he now put the quartz arrow on it beside the other finds. Lyb looked at the skull, but it looked smaller and darker and less horrible than it had by lamplight. "This is going to be a really important dig," Mr. Clark said. "I think we've only made a beginning."

Lyb looked up at him and saw that there were small smiling lines on either side of his eyes. He's going to be nice, she realized suddenly. He isn't

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furious and he's terribly, terribly nice. She started to say something, but just then Sandy made a short excited noise. He bent over the canvas, and now he straightened up with two gray stone ax heads in his hands. "My ax heads," he said. "The two beauties I lost the day we had the fire."

"Your heads?" Mr. Clark said, and then suddenly he began to laugh. "You mean those were your heads. I picked them up beside two boulders where it looked as though someone had had a picnic fire."

"Th-that's right!" Sandy said, and now he stammered with excitement. "Those were my heads, and we left 'em there when the twins' pig got away. I knew, I just knew I hadn't lost them, and at first—well, at first we even thought Sig might have taken them."

"You certainly did," Sig said, and he pulled back Spuggy, whose feet were dangerously near the objects on the canvas. "And I thought just at first that maybe Lyb had hidden 'em just to get a rise out of you!"

"But did the ax heads make you find this place?" Lyb asked, and Mr. Clark shook his head.

"No," he said. "At least not exactly. They just made me pretty sure I was in the right territory."

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"But when did you know?" Sig asked. "When you bought the island?"

"Not even then," Mr. Clark said. "When I heard Dan Akeley was around I was more sure than ever I was on the right track, but I didn't know until last night."

"But why did Akeley give you an idea? Did you know him before?"

Mr. Clark nodded, and for a moment his face was flinty hard. "He worked for me once," he said. "Out in New Mexico. He learned just enough about old things to decide it might be a pretty good business to take them on his own. I heard he turned up at the Peabody Museum with a lot of things they wouldn't buy, and then the next thing I knew he was seen in Berkely.

"Then we were right!" Lyb said, and now she was so excited she wasn't even afraid of what Mr. Clark might say. "He told us a lot of spooky things about this place, and I guess he wanted to get rid of us."

"And the arrow!" Sig said. "What d'you bet he shot the arrow?"

"What arrow?" Mr. Clark asked, and they told him about the arrow tipped with the black feathers. "That's just the kind of thing he would do," Mr.

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Clark said when they'd finished. "As a matter of fact, out in New Mexico he got all of our field crew so frightened they wouldn't work. And then he ruined the digs he couldn't plunder."

Lyb's heart pounded again. "Did we—did we ruin this place," she said, "by digging before you came?"

Mr. Clark took a twin in either hand and led the way out into the sunshine. "You stopped at just the right time," he said. "From now on we'll have to go carefully to get everything that might be in those graves."

"Was Akeley taking the things when you got here last night?" Sandy asked.

"Starting to," Mr. Clark said. "But we caught him in time. He'd probably have cleaned this place out if you people hadn't stuck it out until he was caught."

"Stuck it out!" The words exploded from Sandy's mouth. "Then you aren't furious because we started?"

Mr. Clark shook his head, and Lyb was more sure than ever that she liked him. "I should say not," he said. "If it hadn't been for you people I probably wouldn't have found this place until Akeley had dug out any important things and skipped."

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"But how did Akeley find it?" Sandy asked. "How did he know everything was here?"

"I don't believe he did know until yesterday," Mr. Clark said. "And none of us knows the whole story. But even those ax heads and the drills and the best arrows would be worth taking. I guess when he saw you had made one or two finds he thought it was a pretty good chance, and then when he heard I was interested in the place he was sure. He'd been bribing all the boys in the village to find out where the man who was boarding up at Heinrich's made any finds. I thought maybe he'd put you up to asking," he said, turning to Sandy. "That evening we met up at the bridge."

Sandy grinned and sat down beside Mr. Clark under the buttonwood tree. "Your island's a mess," Mr. Clark went on as they looked out over the scraps of wood and the mounds of new dirt that had been beaten down by the rain. "And I'm afraid it'll be worse before we finish digging."

"When are you going to start?" Sandy asked.

"Probably Tuesday," Mr. Clark said. "When my assistant comes down from Amherst. We'll probably trench the whole island from that big buttonwood right through the site of the barn."

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"Then you think it was a camp site?"

"There isn't any doubt of it. Not from the things you found and Akeley's digging."

Lyb no longer listened but turned and looked at Sig, and it was plain from his face that he was thinking the same things that she was. The island would be ruined. Dug up from one end to the other, and then perhaps Mr. Clark would drain the marshes and build. It was perfectly all right, of course. He'd been wonderfully nice about their trespassing, but Lyb couldn't help sighing as she stretched out for the last time under the buttonwood.

"We'll be all through before the ground freezes," Mr. Clark finished. "Of course you can never tell how much you're going to find, but a place as small as this couldn't take more than a few months."

"And then will you start to build?" Lyb asked.

"Build?" Mr. Clark said, and he looked down at her over his glasses. "I'm not going to build. I'll just work out this dig and then hand the place over to your father."

"To Father?"

"Why, yes. Didn't he tell you? He came up to see me about this land as soon as I bought it. Then last night I told him I'd sell it back for the same two

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hundred dollars I bought it for if he'd let me finish out the dig."

Lyb sprang to her feet and Sandy sat up like a startled rabbit. "You mean our father owns this place? Or rather, he will own it as soon as you're finished?"

"Exactly. I rather thought from the way he spoke that you'd gotten fond of the place, and he thought you'd want to do some more camping here next summer."

"Oh boy!" Lyb said, and Sig let out a whistle that brought the twins rushing back from the lookout rock at the end of the island.

"Father's bought the island!" Sandy said when the twins were beside them. "And next summer we can be down here as much as we want!"

"And it won't be changed a bit," Lyb shouted.

Somehow they managed to say good-by to Mr. Clark and get up the hill to the house. Mother and Father were both waiting for them on the front porch with the dogs between them. "So you know," Mother said when she saw their faces. "But I didn't tell them, Fred. I didn't say a word."

"Can we really use the island?" Lyb said, and as she looked at her father's pleasant sunburned face

BUTTONWOOD ISLAND

she wondered how she had ever thought he was just a mean old tease.

"You can use it, princess," he said, and now his funny little twisted smile didn't make Lyb angry at all. "You can use it as long as you promise to tell me if you strike any diamonds."

"And can we fix over the barn?" Sig asked.

Mr. Hardwicke nodded. "Of course," he said. "And your father said he'd supply the wood. You see, we told him about it yesterday, and he was very enthusiastic about the whole thing."

"Oh b——" Lyb began, but now Mother had something to say.

"How about the finds?" she asked. "Did Mr. Clark tell you what he was going to do about those?"

Lyb shook her head. "We didn't give him a chance. As soon as we found you and Dad had bought this place we scooted to hear more about it."

"Well, most of the things are going to a museum, but he said that there'd be some duplicates that he wouldn't need and he thought perhaps you'd like to divide them among you."

Lyb looked at Sandy's happy, excited face and then at Sig, who was struggling to lift Spinney up

AFTER THE STORM

on his shoulder. "How about letting——" she said, and Sig finished for her.

"The Indian things go to the Honorary Looker-Upper," he said. "Sandy was the one that had the idea where to look in the first place."

For a minute Sandy stood perfectly still. First his face was white and then it flooded red right to the tips of his big ears. Suddenly he gave a yell that made even the Narraganset Indian cry seem tame. He hugged Mother and then he dashed off with Spuggy on a wild dance around the porch. "The island's ours!" he shouted. "And some of the heads. And we can have an Indian riding club forever and ever."

"And we'll be in it," Spinney said, hugging the top of Sig's head. "And next year Thig'll help uth to find some real live Indianth."

7/28



JUVENILE

Sig's Stable

Wood

Sig's Dad

Barnegat

Bingle & pups

Schooling Ring

Woods

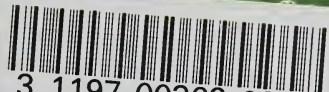
Sig & Miss

Woods

Winsome's Field

Swamp

Berkely Road



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